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“DANTE INTERPRETED,”

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LIFE, TIMES, AND
CHARACTER OF DANTE, WITH AN ANALY-
SIS OF THE DIVINE COMEDY AND
ORIGINAL TRANSLATIONS IN
THE SPENSERIAN STANZA

BY

EPIPHANIUS WILSON



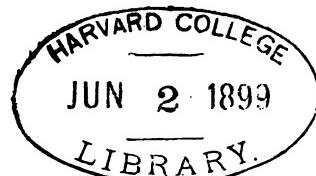
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Dante Society

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PREFACE

François Coppée, in his delightful *Mon Franc Parler*, speaking of the neglect of bygone poets, says “most people know nothing of the *Divine Comedy* excepting the *Inferno*, and merely certain episodes of that.”

The present work is intended as a brief introduction to the whole poem, accompanied with such information as shall enable the ordinary reader to know Dante.

The translations are in the Spenserian stanza of nine lines. Nine and three were key numbers in Dante’s mind, and his poetic period over and over again falls into sections of nine lines. Hence the natural fitness of this English metre.

The text used is that of Dr. E. Moore, compared with the text of G. A. Scartazzini. When these authorities differ the author has acted according to his own judgment.



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DANTE INTERPRETED

CHAPTER I

DANTE—HIS LIFE, TIMES, AND CHARACTER

ON the north-west of the map of Italy is a territory stretching from the Bay of Spezia, where Shelley's body was washed ashore, southward to a point a little below Capo Ercole. East and north-east it is enclosed by spurs of the Apennines. It is a fertile and beautiful land, abounding in forest and pasture, and watered by noble rivers. This is Tuscany, that ancient Etruria whose early civilisation was so far in advance of that of Rome. From Etruria Rome derived her knowledge of the arts; from the strange and obscure people who dwelt between the Etruscan Apennines and

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Dante Alighieri was born at Florence in the year 1265. His family were not noble, though of ancient lineage. Florence at the time was a comparatively small walled city, the largest part of which stood on the left bank of the Arno. Arnolfo had not yet reared the wall of the cathedral which since his day has awed and delighted the traveller. The old Bargello, within whose chamber Giotto was to paint the poet of the *Inferno*, was in process of building. The Palazzo Vecchio was but begun. The Campanile which Giotto was to hang like a flower in the sky of Florence was not even designed. The Baptistry, in which the child Dante was baptised, had not received the covering of marble which it wears now. Yet even at this time the city was studded with handsome dwellings, and the refinements of domestic architecture and equipment brought into Europe by the Crusaders were beginning to appear in Florence the Fair, as Dante styles it, the loveliest and most famous daughter of Rome.¹

¹ Bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma, Fiorenza.—*Conv.*, i., 3.

Dante was born indeed at a time when the simplicity of Tuscan life and manners was fast giving way to the Eastern luxury introduced by one of the successors of Barbarossa, Frederick II., the gay, the brave, the wise, the relentless, the godless Frederick—whom Dante afterwards in his *Convito* has set forth as the last of the Roman Emperors.¹

In his *Paradiso* the poet introduces his own ancestor Cacciaguida, who thus inveighs against the degeneracy of Florence in the thirteenth century :

While Florence in the narrow precinct lay,
Whence still the bell rings out the hours of
prayer,²
The city's life ran peaceably its way
Temperate and chaste; nor did her ladies dare
Gold chains, nor crowns, nor sandalled shoon to
wear,
Nor girdle that outvied the wearer's face;
Nor did the birth of daughters fill with care
The father; each in wedlock could he place,
And at a fitting age with fitting dowry grace.

¹ Ultimo imperadore de' Romani.—*Conv.*, iv., 3.

² I. e., wherein the cathedral stands, whose bells ring the hours.

There were no childless homes; nor yet had come
 Sardanapalus, teaching wantonness;
 Nor had fair Montemalo¹ looked on Rome,
 And seen a view, eclipsed in loveliness
 By your Uccellatojo; and not less
 Shall Rome outstripped by Florence in her fall
 Than in her rising be. I saw in dress
 Of bone and leather Berti walk, and all
 Untouched by paint his dame rise from her mirrored
 hall.

And he of Nerli, he of Vecchio, too,
 With simple coats of buff were satisfied;
 And no more pleasing task their ladies knew
 Than flax or spindle to their hands supplied.
 Fortunate women! certain, when they died,
 Of a home burial-place; nor need they fear
 That France would take their husbands from
 their side;
 But while one o'er the cradle warbled clear
 The words of lullaby to sires and matrons dear,

Another from her distaff drew the thread,
 Telling the story, to her children round,
 Of Fesole, and Rome, and him who led
 The Trojans; for in those days to have found
 Such as Cianghella² in the cities bound,

¹ From the hill Montemalo are seen the buildings of Rome, from Uccellatojo those of Florence, by travellers approaching the several cities. The meaning is that the splendour of Rome was not yet eclipsed by that of the Tuscan city.

² A dissolute lady of Dante's time at Florence.

Or Lapo Salterella,¹ would, I trow,
Have been as rare and great a portent owned
As to discern, from out the city's slough,
A Cincinnatus rise, or a Cornelia now.

To such a tranquil, such a fair and bright
Dwelling of citizens, a home so staid
And safe, to such a hostel of delight,
Mary, when piercing cries invoked her aid,
Brought me, and on my mother's bosom laid;
And thence, within your ancient Baptistry,
Christian and Cacciaguida I was made.²

If Dante was born in a day of growing luxury, refinement, and daintiness, just as truly was the thirteenth century in Tuscany a time of cruelty, strife, and relentless faction warfare. It is almost incredible how easily, according to ancient and modern historians, the sword was drawn in the streets of Florence, and how rapidly a personal encounter between two men grew to a family feud such as is not exaggerated in the *Romeo and Juliet* of Shakespeare. This reckless spirit of hatred and murder which filled cities where art, chivalry, and poetry were mounting to their highest perfection, is thus described by a modern writer:

¹ A worthless lawyer and judge of the same time and city.

² *I. e.*, was baptised and named.—*Par.*, xv., 97-135.

It was not the simple movement of one great body against another; not the force of a government in opposition to the people; not the struggle of privilege and democracy, of poverty and riches, or starvation and repletion; but one universal burst of unmitigated anarchy. In the streets, lanes, and squares, in the courts of palaces and humbler dwellings, were heard the clang of arms, the screams of victims, and the gush of blood; the bow of the bridegroom launched its arrows into the very chambers of his young bride's parents and relations, and the bleeding son, the murdered brother, or the dying husband were the evening visitors of Florentine maids and matrons and aged citizens. Every art was practised to seduce and deceive, and none felt secure even of their nearest and dearest relatives. In the morning the son left his parental roof with undiminished love, and returned at evening a corpse, or the most bitter enemy! Terror and death were triumphant; there was no relaxation, no peace by day or night; the crash of the stone, or the twang of the bow, the whizzing shaft, the jar of the trembling mangonel from tower and turret, were the dismal music of Florence, not only for hours and days, but months and years. Doors, windows, the jutting galleries and roofs, were all defended, and yet all unsafe; no spot was sacred, no tenement secure; in the dead of night, the most secret chambers, the very hangings, even the nuptial bed itself, were often known to conceal an enemy.¹

¹ Napier's *Florentine History*, i., 122.

Many episodes might be cited from the *Divine Comedy* to illustrate this condition of things. It is perhaps more to the point for us to observe how this bitter strife and unrestrained passion are reflected in the character and even in the countenance of our poet himself; how they lend a tinge, so to speak, to the most intense moods of his poetry, and add the sting to the calmest and most just of his many denunciations.

For Dante has himself denounced this spirit of brutal cruelty and treachery and cunning which pervaded society among the Tuscan republics.

In a famous passage from his *Purgatorio* he stigmatises in turn all the cities which stand on the bank of the Arno, from its fountainhead in Falterona to the sea. For subtlety of invention, for concentrated bitterness, for felicity in the expression of unsparing invective, this passage is, as far as I know, unparalleled in literature. Casentino, Arezzo, Florence, and Pisa, all, one after another, come under the stroke of the poet's scorpion lash. All by the cup of Circe have been changed into beasts;

they are all either swine, curs, wolves, or foxes. Dante is asked by one of the denizens of the Hill of Purification, who he is, and answers:

" There runs a stream through midst of Tuscany,
Whose waters first in Falterona spring;
Of scarce a hundred miles its course; and I
From that flood's margin do my body bring.
To tell my title, were an idle thing,
Since it is still but little known to fame."

Then he who first had spoken, answering
Addressed me: " If my intellect can frame
Thy meaning, Arno, sure, must be the river's
name."

Then said to him the other: " Why should he
Hide the stream's appellation, as men do
Of things most horrible in infamy ? "

" I know not, and yet verily 't is due
That blank oblivion should the name pursue
Of such a valley," said the questioned shade;
" For from its fountainhead, where rise to view
The loftiest crests that Alpine forests shade
[From which Pelorus, wrenched, a southern isle
has made],

" Down to the point where it to ocean yields
'Itself, for what the heavens of ocean take
To send the brimming rivers through the fields,
Virtue is shunned, as is some deadly snake;
His weapon each one 'gainst her seems to take

As 'gainst a foe. But whether 't is the place
Misfortunate, or evil custom, wields
Malignant influence o'er that valley base,
'T would seem that Circe held imprisoned all the
race.

" 'T is mid foul swine, of acorns worthier they
Than human food, that first the runnel creeps;
Thence amid dogs it cleaves its downward way.
From dogs, more noisy far than brave, it sweeps
Disdainfully adown the mountain steeps,
And falls, and finds, the more it waxes, change
The more to wolves these curs. Still downward
leaps
The cursed ditch, with fortune foul and strange,
To where, with fraud and guile replete, the foxes
range."¹

The hogs of Casentino, the curs of Arezzo,
the wolves of Florence, and the foxes of Pisa
are not alone vituperated. Most of the other
cities of Tuscany come equally under the poet's
condemnation. The men of Siena are vainer
than Frenchmen.

In the *Inferno*, among those punished by
leprosy appears Capocchio, " who metals falsified
by alchemy,"² and was burned by Albert
of Siena because the alchemist undertook to

¹ *Purg.*, xiv., 16-53.

² *Inf.*, xxix., 137.

fly and failed in the attempt. On hearing this story the poet bursts out:

Were ever idler people known than these ?
The French are not so vain as are the Siennese.¹

The men of Pistoia are beasts and mules, creatures as vile as those who founded the city, *i. e.*, the survivors of the Catilinarian conspiracy. Amid the snakes of the infernal valley the poet finds one who thus accounts of himself:

I lately falling like a rain-drop left
My Tuscany for this accursed glen ;
A bestial life, and not the life of men
I led, and like a mule of reason reft
I, Vanni Fucci, lived a beast; and then
Pistoia was for me a fitting lair.²

In the next canto the poet thus apostrophised the city :

Pistoia, ah ! Pistoia, why decline
To turn thyself to ashes and to perish,
Since in that practised villainy of thine
Thou dost excel thy founders.³

¹ *Inf.*, xxix., 121, 122.

² *Inf.*, xxiv., 122-126.

³ *I. e.*, the Catilinarians. *Inf.*, xxv., 10-12.

Nor does Lucca escape. Saint Zita was the patron saint of Lucca, and the poet places in his *Inferno*, with grotesque and savage imagery, one of the elders of Saint Zita, *i. e.*, one of the magistrates of Lucca, as among barrators (*i. e.*, those who sell offices and judicial decisions for gold). The devils are represented as plunging such into tanks of boiling pitch, and one of them cries to another:

O Malebranche, see
That elder of St. Zita; let him be
Pressed and plunged deeper in the fiery tide
While I return for captives to the town
Where many another of the sort abide.¹

We need not take too literally everything that Dante says about his contemporaries, or side with him in his views of the political parties of his day; but that the Tuscan republics were full of luxury, corruption, cruelty, and anarchy is a pretty well established fact to those who have studied impartial historians. The thirteenth century was a transition period: the authority of the papal Church was being

¹ *Inf.*, xxi., 37-40.

shaken, its claims disputed; the old was losing its full controlling and enlightening power, and the new had not yet come. Dante dared to put one Pope in his *Inferno*, to the delight of Voltaire,¹ and to condemn another in terms of withering sarcasm and contempt.² There were many harbingers of the Renaissance that should discredit scholasticism and of the Reformation that should purify Christianity. It is not too much to say that Dante was the morning star that heralded both these great movements. He was more than this. He was a prophet whose voice rang in a wilderness where moral distinctions had become obscured, where the fountains of moral truth had become tainted by ecclesiastical and political guile and selfishness, and where Christian love and charity had withered away on their stalk. The eloquence of Dante is sped not only with the wings of fierce indignation for an irreparable personal wrong. His invective flies by the force of reason and righteousness. He smites

¹ *Inf.*, iii., 59. Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, "Le Dante."

² *Inf.*, xix., 52; cf. *Inf.*, xxvii., 85, and *Par.*, xxvii., 22.

in the spirit of a patriot, a lover of mankind, and a worshipper of the God of holiness.

Before proceeding to consider the poet as a soldier, a statesman, and an exile, we must dwell a while on the boy love of Dante which became so important an element in his spiritual biography.

Dante first met Beatrice Portinari at the house of her father Folco, during the festival of May-day, 1274, when he was nine years old. Love comes early to poetic and romantic natures like those of Dante, Rousseau, and Byron, although it may wear a different complexion to each. Certainly the tears and pallor which it brought to the Florentine poet were scarcely in harmony with

The bloom of young desire and purple light of
love,

but rather belonged to those

that walk in willow wood,
That walk with hollow faces, burning white.¹

The love of Dante, as described in his *New*

¹ Rossetti.

Life, is shadowed by the austere rapture and devotion of a Franciscan convent, is tricked out by the artificiality, the fantastic self-humiliation, of chivalry, and is expressed in terms of pedantic scholasticism. Nevertheless it is a love, real, passionate, and abiding. He describes Beatrice as nine years of age. "Her dress on that day was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort, as best suited with her tender age. At that moment," he continues, "I saw most truly that the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secret chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith; and in trembling it said these words—'Lo! a god mightier than I, who comes to have dominion over me.'"¹

He must have met her only twice or thrice after that, yet he continues his description of his passion for her until a year after her death in 1290, when she must have been twenty-five years old. She had become in the meantime married to Simone de' Bardi. Dante remained

¹ *V. N.*, § 2.

single until, in his own words, “The Lord of Justice called this most gentle one to glory, under the banner of that holy Queen Mary.”¹ But he became the husband of Gemma Donati in the year 1292, two years after the death of Beatrice.

His love for his “most gentle” lady was indeed of an order that fulfilled his own saying, “The Lordship of love is good, in that it withdraws the inclination of his liegeman from all evil things.”

We have no reason to think that this love of Dante’s was ever returned. He said, in answer to a lady who questioned him, that the only reward of his love which he desired, was the silent salutation which he received from Beatrice when passing her in the street. When at last even this salutation was denied him, he confessed that his love was amply rewarded by hearing her praised. The remoteness of its object undoubtedly intensified while it sublimated this love. In life or death she is still beside him. One day his friends surprised him in the act of drawing an angel on a tablet, for

¹ *V. N.*, § 29.

as Giotto and Angelo were poets, so Dante was an artist. When at last he noticed them, he suddenly rose to his feet and saluted them. "Another," he says significantly, "was just now with me, and on this account I was in thought."

After her death he had visions of the Beatrice of his boyhood. "I seemed to see," he says, "this glorified Beatrice, in those crimson garments in which she had first appeared to my eyes, and she seemed to me young, of the same age as when I first saw her."¹

As long as human nature remains what it is now, and ever has been, the love of Dante will live in literature as one of the most profoundly pathetic, one of the most exquisitely beautiful, of human experiences.

If, as Balzac says, "There is nothing so like divine love as a love that is without return," the passion of Dante was certainly not without some element of the divine. But it was divine in another sense. There are two poles between which the intellectual and spiritual life of Dante revolved. The one was his hatred for wrong

¹ *V. N.*, § 40.

and injustice as experienced in his own exile and personified in Florence and its inhabitants. The other is his love for Beatrice, as that love led him to the consolations of philosophy; and philosophy led him, by contemplation, into the peace and presence of God. This fact of his experience is suggested in the *Divine Comedy* by the circumstance that Virgil guides the poet through that Inferno where he sees in torment the enemies of his life, his country, and his God; and that afterwards he is taken to Beatrice up the hill of Purgatory, or spiritual Purification, and on through circle after circle of light until he reaches the ineffable Presence. The intellect and the poetic passion of Dante are always closely interwoven, both in his subjective life and in his literary work. It seems cold and hard to say that Beatrice represented to him and was meant by him to represent philosophy, which he sometimes personifies as a lady. Underlying all such personifications and all such allegory is the basis of a purely human attachment, exalted by separation and death, and finally transporting the heart and mind of the poet from earth

to Paradise; coupled with this profound and passionate emotion which pursues its object even to the highest circle of heaven, is the intellectual activity which explores, investigates, and attempts to set forth in reasonable, concrete, and vivid order an account of this gradual process of exaltation. But the art of Dante has generalised his theme and enlarged its scope, so as to comprise the universe as theatre, and all mankind as actors in the drama.

After all, however, it is merely one human being, vanished out of sight and calling through the darkness to another human being, who straightway proceeds to build a steep and rugged pathway out of all the resources of knowledge, philosophy, and poetic genius, and to grope his way up to the threshold of that eternal and ideal world, where his half-adoring homage has enthroned its object.

During the year which Dante was describing in his *New Life* as most calm and full of ecstatic peace to himself, stirring events had taken place in Tuscany. In the very year to which belongs the sonnet beginning

So gentle and so modest doth appear
My lady when she giveth her salute,
That every tongue becometh trembling mute,¹

the tragedy of Count Ugolino took place. Ugolino had deserted the Pisan fleet when the Guelphs of Genoa were just on the point of defeating the Ghibellines of Pisa. Ugolino fled to Pisa expecting to rouse the Pisan Guelphs, of which party he was leader, and rescue the city from the defeated Ghibellines. In punishment, the traitor, with his two sons and two nephews, was locked in the tower of the Pisan Ghibellines, the home of the Ugolandì, and the key thrown into the Arno. In that prison they perished of hunger. This story is one of the best-known episodes of the *Inferno*.² In the same year Francesca da Rimini was murdered by her husband. This gave Dante a subject for the fifth canto of the *Inferno*, of which Leigh Hunt says, “it is a lily in the mouth of Tartarus.” This seems to be the foppery of cockney criticism. Dante’s grand episode is far more. It is a lifelike picture of human nature where the best and

¹ *V. N.*, § 26, sonnet 25.

² *Inf.*, xxxiii., 13.

the worst elements appear inextricably blended, and Lancelot's account of himself in the *Holy Grail* of Tennyson seems, perhaps, the best comment upon it.

Between the occurrence of these two events, illustrative as they are of the merciless cruelty of the times, the battle of Campaldino had been fought and Dante had taken part in it. The plain of Campaldino is to-day covered with vineyards and fringed with thick groves of chestnuts climbing the mountain slopes. The battle was fought at a time when the place was almost uncultivated, and only frequented by vast herds of swine, who fattened on the nuts and herbage.

On June 11, 1289, when Dante was in his twenty-fifth year, it presented a gallant appearance under the blazing sun of summer. Upon the hillside were marshalled in glittering ranks hosts of banished Ghibellines, reinforced by an army from Arezzo. The great war-wagon, the *carroccio* of Florence, in the centre of which were set up masts bearing flags emblazoned with the lily, the ensign of the city, was crossing the valley before the other

army composed of Guelph contingents from Florence, Lucca, Siena, and other Tuscan towns. The Florentine war-bell, the *martnella*, rang out its fierce tocsin from the little tower erected on this red waggon, drawn by oxen with red housings, and surrounded by the flower of Florentine chivalry.

A company of one hundred and fifty light-armed horsemen advanced from the Guelph army in a sort of skirmishing brigade. Among them was Dante, selected, doubtless, for this post of peril on account of his skill in horsemanship, his courage, and high rank in the republic. In the battle of Campaldino the Ghibellines were put to utter rout and Dante returned to Florence among the victors. The triumphant army was enthusiastically welcomed back, and thirty-six thousand gold florins, the whole expense of the campaign, were gladly paid by the Florentines. Dante has alluded to this battle in an extant fragment of one of his letters. "At the battle of Campaldino," he says, "the Ghibelline party was defeated and almost annihilated, and I was there a novice in arms; I had great fear, and at

last great joy, on account of the divers chances of the fight."¹

It may be to Campaldino he alludes when, in describing the march of demons by the pits of burning pitch, he says:

I have seen horsemen, breaking up their camp
And marshalling for battle; I have seen
Their onsets, and have heard the heavy tramp
Of a retreat; vant-couriers on your green
Uplands, and foragers full oft have been
Before my eyes, and when the tournament
Was set, O Aretines, with jousting keen,
Trumpets and bells their notes of challenge blent
And drums and signal fires from every battlement.²

Among the exiled Ghibellines of Florence was one whose body was left on the field of Campaldino—Buonconte da Montefeltro. His ultimate fate was never really known, and Dante's account in the *Purgatorio* is an imaginary explanation which the poet has given with that wonderful conciseness of description which is at once lifelike and highly affecting. “For one poor little tear” of penitence, for

¹ Quoted by Leonardo Bruni, in his *Vita di Dante*.

² *Inf.*, xxii., 1–8.

one invocation of Mary, God's Angel carried Buonconte from the clutches of the Spirit of Hell up to the mount of Purgatory. Then the power of evil revenges itself for the loss of Buonconte's soul by raising a rain-storm to wash his body down and bury it under the rocks in the bed of Arno. But let Buonconte, in Dante's language, speak for himself:

" I am of Montefeltro, and am named
Buonconte; none now gives a thought to me
Not even my Giovanna¹; hence ashamed
And sad my face among these shades you see."
Then I enquired of him, " What might it be
Of violence or mischance that so far led
Tny steps from Campaldino's field, that we
Know not thy resting-place among the dead ? "
" At Casentino's foot," the mournful spirit said,

" The plain is by the Archiano crossed,
Which o'er the Hermitage in Apennine
First bubbles forth, and where its name is lost
In Arno, I, when wounds this throat of mine
Had pierced, arrived in flight, a bloody line
Leaving behind me on the plain; away
Faded my sight, and in the name divine
Of Mary ceased my words; and on that day
Mere flesh and tenantless, my broken body lay.

¹ His wife, Giovanna da Montefeltro.

“ ‘T is truth I speak; repeat it to the living.
God’s Angel took me up, while he of hell
Protested: ‘Thou from heaven, what dost thou,
giving

The eternal part of him in peace to dwell,
Because his eyes with one poor tear-drop swell.
Thou robtest me of what I deemed my own
Yet on the rest I will revenge me well’;
Thou knowest how humid fogs the skies retain,
That by the cold condensed, descend in showers of
rain;

“ An evil will, that evil still would crave,
He joined with intellect, and fog and wind,
With all the power his devilish nature gave,
He stirred, and when the day was spent, confined
Within the valley all the mists that twined
Round Protomagno, and the ridges steep;
The close-pent heavens served well what he de-
signed;
Down from the full-charged clouds the rain-drops
sweep,
And torrent gullies take what the soil cannot keep.

“ And as the shower with mighty freshets blends
Its flood, towards the regal river bound,
Headlong, unchecked by aught its course it bends;
And mighty Archiano, on the ground
Near to its outlet, my poor body found,
And into Arno swept it; from my breast
Loosing the cross my arms had made around

My heart, and down to Arno's bottom pressed
And with the drifted rocks, buried in endless rest."¹

Dante is shown by documents still extant in the archives of his native city to have taken an active part in Florentine politics in the year 1296. He was subsequently elected to be one of the Priori, magistrates to whom the government of the city had been committed in 1282. But the rage of faction, "Florentine frenzy,"² as the poet termed it, had already broken out in Florence. The old chronicler, Giovanni Fiorentino, gives an account of the origin of this bloody and reckless civil war which is characteristic of the time:

In the city of Pistoia flourished a noble family, the Cancellieri, derived from Messer Cancelliere, a man enriched by commercial transactions. This man had numerous sons by his two wives, and the branches of the family increased so fast that they numbered a hundred men at arms. Unhappily a rivalship arose between sons of this family in the affections of a lovely girl. They therefore separated themselves into two parties and filled the city with bloodshed and uproar, those descended from

¹ *Purg.*, v., 88.

² *La rabbia fiorentina*.—*Purg.*, xi., 113.

the first wife of Messer Cancelliere taking the title of Cancellieri Bianchi; those from the second, Cancellieri Neri—*i. e.*, Whites and Blacks of the Cancellieri. On coming to a decisive battle the Neri were defeated, and wishing to adjust the affair as well as they yet could, they sent their relation, who had offended the opposite party, to entreat forgiveness on the part of the Neri, expecting that such submissive conduct would meet with the compassion it deserved. On arriving in the presence of the Bianchi, who conceived themselves the offended party, the young man, on bended knees, appealed to their feelings for forgiveness, observing, that he had placed himself in their power, that so they might inflict what punishment they judged proper: when several of the younger members of the offending party, seizing on him, dragged him into an adjoining stable, and ordered that his right hand should be severed from his body. In the utmost terror the youth, with tears in his eyes, besought them to have mercy, and to take a great and nobler revenge, by pardoning one whom they had it in their power thus deeply to injure. But heedless of his prayers they bound his hand by force upon the manger, and struck it off; a deed which excited the utmost tumult throughout Pistoia, and such indignation and reproaches from the injured party of the Neri as to implicate the whole city in a division of interests between them and the Bianchi, which led to many desperate encounters.

The citizens, fearful lest the faction might cause

insurrections throughout the whole territory, in conjunction with the Guelphs, applied to the Florentines in order to reconcile them. The seeds of the same dissension being thus sown in Florence, the whole city became divided, and so rapidly did this pestiferous spirit gain ground in Florence, that it speedily became a scene of rapine and devastation.¹

It is not necessary to go into further details about this feud. In Florence the Blacks were victorious, and Dante was among the Whites.

Popes and cardinals in vain attempted to heal the terrible and suicidal division, and to reverse the sentence of exile and confiscation of goods passed upon the defeated Whites. On January 27, 1302, Dante, with three others, was accused of malversation of funds and other crimes. A heavy fine was imposed upon them; if these fines were not paid in three days their property was to be laid waste. In any case they were to be banished for two years from the limits of Tuscany, and were disqualified for public office in Florence. Dante fled to Siena without obeying the sentence, and, with fourteen others, was condemned to be burned alive if ever he fell into the hands of the Florentines.

¹ Translated in Roscoe's *Italian Novelists*, i., 322.

He never saw Florence again. Effort after effort did he make to return, but each attempt was so baffled as only to lodge in the exile's heart another thorn of hope deferred. He wandered about from city to city,—Verona, Paris, Bologna, perhaps London and Oxford.

When, in the year 1314, Dante added two books to the MS. of his Banquet (*Il Convito*), and published it as his last work, he utters the following lament over his sufferings in exile:

Ah! had it but pleased the Dispenser of the Universe that neither others should have injured me, nor that I had suffered this pain—the pain, I say, of exile and poverty. Since it pleased the citizens of the fairest and most famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me forth from her most sweet bosom wherein I was born and nourished up to the climax of my life, and wherein, by their good leave, I long with all my heart to rest my weary soul, and to end the days allotted to me, through almost every part where her language is spoken I have wandered, a pilgrim, almost a beggar, displaying against my will the wounds of fortune, which are often wont to be imputed unjustly to the wounded one himself. Truly have I been a vessel without sail and without rudder, borne to divers ports and shores and havens by the dry wind that blows from dolorous poverty; and

have appeared vile in the eyes of many who, perhaps, through some fame of me, had imagined me in other guise; in whose consideration, not only did I in person suffer abasement, but all my work became of less account, that already done as well as that yet to do.¹

It was three years after this that an offer was made to Dante that he would be restored to Florence on condition that he and his fellow-exiles pay a fine, walk in a dress of penance to the Church of St. John, and there ask absolution for their offences. This offer he indignantly refused in a letter still extant.²

Is such an invitation, then, to return to his country glorious to Dante Alighieri, after suffering in exile almost fifteen years? No, my father, this is not the way that shall lead me back to my country. I will return with hasty steps, if you or any other can open to me a way that shall not derogate from the fame and honour of Dante; but if by no such way Florence can be entered, then Florence I shall never enter. What! shall I not everywhere enjoy the light of the sun and stars? and may I not seek to contemplate, in every corner of the earth, under the canopy of heaven,

¹ *Conv.*, i., 3.

² The letter is, however, of doubtful authenticity.

consoling and delightful truth, without first rendering myself inglorious, nay infamous, to the people and republic of Florence? Bread, I hope, will not fail me.¹

This noble letter was written four years before the poet's death at Ravenna. The principal place of sojourn for Dante during his exile appears to have been Verona—at the castle of Bartolomeo della Scala, Lord of Verona, and of his son and successor, Can Grande della Scala. Honoured and consoled by the friendship of such men, his proud spirit still chafed under the yoke of dependence, and he puts into the mouth of Cacciaguida, his kinsman, a prophecy which was indeed only the poet's own actual retrospect.

Thou shalt abandon all thou best dost love;
This arrow is the shaft that first shall start
From the fierce bow of exile; thou shalt prove
How salt the bread that falls to beggary's part;
How hard the road on which thou then shalt start,
In going up and down another's stair.
But still the heaviest load upon thy heart
Will be with knaves and idle fools to share
The shelter that this vale affords the dweller there.

¹*Epist. ix., Amico Florentino.*

Ungrateful and enraged and impious
Will they become against thee, but, at last,
The scarlet blush of shame inglorious
Shall, not on thy face, but on theirs be cast,
Whose conduct shall convict their bestial past.
And well it were if thou shouldst make for thee
A party in thine own opinion cast,
For learn,—thine earliest refuge is to be
The mighty Lombard's free and princely courtesy;

Upon the scale, the sainted bird he bears,
And shall on thee such kindly grace bestow
That in your mutual friendship, ere he hears
Thine uttered wish, performance thou shalt
know.¹

A little anecdote confirms many intimations that although Dante has uttered this magnificent eulogy of Can Grande, Lord of Verona, eventually a rupture took place between them. The word Can is, of course, short for *cane*, a dog.

It is related that at table, where buffoons sat down with Dante, a boy was once concealed under the table, who, collecting the bones that were thrown there by the guests, according to the custom of those times, heaped them up at Dante's feet. When the tables were removed, the great heap

¹ *Par.*, xvii., 55–75.

appearing, Can pretended to show much astonishment, and said, "Certainly, Dante is a great devourer of meat." To which Dante readily replied, "My lord, you would not have seen so many bones had I been a dog [*cane*; *i. e.*, one of your own family]."¹

It used to be said that the eye of a dying creature keeps ineffaceably imprinted upon the retina the image that has been last reflected there in life. To Dante his exile was virtually his death, and as Mary of England had "Calais" written over her heart, so to Dante Florence and all that belonged to her were engraved upon the memory. Wherever he turns he sees conjured up by the torturing spell of an inextinguishable homesickness the towers and roofs, the bridges and streets, the faces and the forms from which he has been separated by the ban of exile. The "fair St. John,"² the front of the old Baptistry,³ the street where the poet's ancestor, Cacciaguida, was born,⁴ the ancient bridge of the Arno,⁵ the frescoes of Cimabue and Giotto,⁶ and the songs

¹ Cesare Balbo, *Vita di Dante*.

⁴ *Par.*, xvi., 44.

² *Inf.*, xix., 17.

⁵ *Inf.*, xiii., 146.

³ *Par.*, xv., 97.

⁶ *Purg.*, xi., 94, 95.

of Casella¹ are ever presenting themselves to his memory, and calling to life that passionate longing for return which suggests the love for his native land of an islander or a mountaineer. That white, haggard face is ever turned from Verona, Bologna, or Ravenna towards Florence, the loveliest and most famous daughter of Rome. When contemplation places him in Paradise and he sees the air reflecting the glory of topaz and amethyst, he pauses in the midst of his ecstasy to turn towards Florence and raise his arm and his voice in bitterest lamentation against the city that had indeed, like the base Indian, thrown a pearl away richer than all his tribe. But his thirst for the lost things of his life is intensified by the recollection of them. This thirst the waters of the Arno alone could slake. Like the thirst of the wretched Tuscan he has set in his *Inferno*, and who stands the Tantalus of his Christian Hell, he could say:

The little brooks from all the emerald hills
Of Casentino, down to Arno's plain
Descending, and, with fresh and sparkling rills,

¹ *Purg.*, ii., 91.

Moistening the channels, come to me again,
And now before me stand, and not in vain;
Their image parches more my flesh, than can
The fell disease that wastes my features wan.¹

But the gates of Florence were inexorably closed. The key to those gates, like that key which held Ugolino at Pisa in the Tower of Famine, had been thrown into the river and buried, like the body of Buonconte, under the sand and rocks which were the mountain torrents' bed.

We see in Dante's character the pride that writhes under the imputations of crimes which he could not stoop to commit. We see a hatred destitute of envy and exalted to a virtue by the white heat with which it burns against sin and wrong and every shape of evil. This hatred, virginal in its utter freedom from malignity, is something very different from the barren and hopeless misanthropy of Swift, and that inhuman and cold-blooded cruelty of Juvenal, which are at once without enthusiasm and without compassion. The hatred of Dante

¹ *Inf.*, xxx., 64-69.

is the hatred which is but the shadow of a mighty love, the hatred which eternally rises in the bosom of the best of men, yes, and of God Himself, against blackness and perversity, when these appear in the object which perpetually awakes the passion of admiration and love in the bosom of the hater.

His separation from Florence had impressed Dante with a bitter consciousness of life's failure. He complains that he had left the place of all his opportunities in the very climax of life. Honour, power, reputation, all had been left behind in Florence. He had been forced, moreover, to abandon everything in life beloved most tenderly. It was too late for this proud, gifted, masterful man to begin life over again. The one possible field for his activities had been barred off; the one possible door of happiness shut upon him. The bread of beggary and dependence, salt with tears, had been tasted; the poet of the *Paradiso* had fared with buffoons and ribald squires in the hall of the bluff, coarse soldier, Can Grande, and was pointed at in public for his face of stern melancholy by the muleteers and street boys. To

such, he was “the man who had been through hell.”

When we think of the placid life of such poets as Goethe or Tennyson, we see the trimly kept purlieus of a garden, the softness and smoothness of a meadow-land and level river bank, the symmetry and completeness of a newly finished temple. When we come upon Dante’s life we see that the garden has been trampled by a squadron of horsemen, an earthquake has heaved up the velvet basin of the valley and the river is bursting through crags and over precipices, while the Grecian temple still stands, but stands half dismantled and is blackened and broken with tempest and fire.

But the end came at last. It came at Ravenna. Fitting indeed it was that he who found shelter and bread alone in Lombardy should die upon the seashore in that city where the great river whose waters come from every spring in Lombardy, in his own words, “descends to rest in peace with all his retinue.” Two ancient monuments of Dante alone survive in Italy. The one is the door of Dante at Florence, which he left for exile in the year

1302, the other is the tomb erected over his remains at Ravenna. The monument in Santa Croce, Florence, is modern, vulgar, and ugly, is a reproach to the city, a vain and insincere afterthought, in fact.

Ungrateful Florence! Dante sleeps afar,
Like Scipio, buried by the upbraiding shore ;
Thy factions, in their more than civil war,
Proscribed the bard whose name for evermore
Their children's children would in vain adore
With the remorse of ages.¹

There is a fine portrait of Dante painted by Giotto in the chapel of the Bargello. It shows him as a young man, with features of that proportion, that mingled strength and delicacy, composure, and sensibility which we style well-bred, while the whole face is suffused with the charm of beauty.

But this was Dante in his early days. Here he wears something of that placidity, sweetness, and openness which does not long survive boyhood, excepting in the case of rare natures like those of Milton and Dante. By the time Dante wears the laurel in Raffael's

¹ Byron, *Childe Harold*.

famous picture he has lost this bloom, and gained the wrinkles and concentrated expression of stormy middle age.

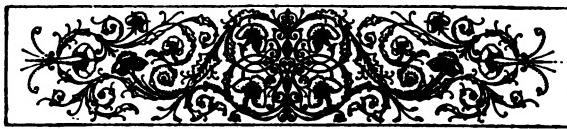
The best portrait of Dante which I can imagine is that given in a word-picture of Balzac in one of his stories, *Les Proscrits*, which all lovers of the Florentine ought to read. It was written after a careful study of the poet's remains.

No one, not even the most stolid, could fail to avow, that upon this man, with his almost supernatural air, nature had bestowed powers the most transcendent. Although his eyes were deeply entrenched beneath the great arches marked out by his eyebrows, they were, like those of a hawk, set with such large pupils, and bordered with a black circle so vividly stamped upon the cheek, that their orbs seemed to be darting forth. In that magic eye there was something indescribably regal and penetrating; the soul of the beholder seemed to be captured by that glance so overwhelming and pregnant with thought, a glance clear and dazzling as the eye of serpents or birds; which yet was amazing in its suggestion of boundless unhappiness coupled with superhuman endurance. The rest of the countenance was quite in harmony with this gaze of lead and fire,—quick, yet motionless, calm, and severe. If in that eagle eye earthly perturba-

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tions seemed to some degree quenched, the face, lean and withered, still bore the traces left by afflicting passions and by great calamities. The nose was straight, and as it fell over the upper lip the nostrils seemed drawn inwards. Wrinkles tightly stretched across the face betrayed the outlines of bony, fleshless jaws. It would seem as if here was the bed of a torrent, where the violence of rolling waters was proved by the depth of furrows which gave evidence of some terrible and eternal struggle. Like the wake of a ship on the billows, two deep folds of skin starting from each side of the nose accentuated the expression of the countenance, and gave to the mouth, firm and unwavering as it was, the ineffaceable stamp of melancholy and bitterness. But above the storm and tempest of this visage the placid forehead shone out with a sort of defiance and crowned the features as it were with a dome of marble.





CHAPTER II

DANTE AS A POET—HIS STYLE, METHOD, AND MATERIALS

DANTE is the poet of the Middle Ages in Europe, just as Homer was the poet of the heroic age of Greece, and Virgil was the Roman poet of the Empire. It has been said that in Dante ten centuries found a voice. Dante was the direct product of mediæval Christianity. In those ten centuries ancient art and learning had been buried in barbarism, and had begun to

trick their beams, and with new spangled ore,
Flame in the forehead of the morning sky.¹

Christianity had met a new rival in the East, whose sword had desolated the Eastern Empire, whose horse hoofs had violated every sanctu-

¹ Milton, *Lycidas*.

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ary of the Eastern Church, and who had provoked to new zeal and valour the paladins of Western Europe. The Crusades had brought to Italy and France the spoils of art, luxury, and science; Hildebrand had raised up the Roman Church to be a rival of the Empire of Charlemagne, and Barbarossa had revived an imperial autocracy that eventually should extort at Anagni just retribution for the presumptuous display of arrogance at Canossa. Monasticism had manifested its purest, most practical, and most splendid developments as the cherisher of arts, letters, and the spiritual life. Finally, scholasticism had crystallised the Christian intellectualism of the Western Church, and under its stamp the new-born Roman language acquired the copiousness of the tongue of Cicero, the flexibility and precision of the language of Plato.

On one point in particular Dante was very far removed from both Homer and Virgil. In Greek and Latin literature philosophy was kept quite distinct from all works of the imagination. The atmosphere of the poems of Homer and Virgil is mythology. The super-

natural powers that watch the contest on the windy plain of Troy, as well as those which espouse or oppose the voyage of *Æneas*, are creatures of the imagination, personifications of the powers of nature, of chance, fate, or war. There is no attempt to give an account of the great questions of man's destiny, his nature as a moral being, nor to trace causation in natural phenomena or the progress of human events. Homer's aim is to glorify Greece by describing the valour and grace of a representative Greek, the young, the fateful, the irresistible warrior Achilles. Virgil was a court poet whose object was to celebrate the grandeur of Rome and to flatter the vanity of the house of Augustus.

Dante's object was to give a description of the human race and its destiny. The externalism of the Greek and Latin writers concentrated their attention on the powers of nature as manifested in the beauty and order, as well as in the irresistible forces of the material world. In conflict or harmony with these were represented the activities of the human race. To the Greek, man, in his instincts and appetites,

his skill and courage, may appear as the conqueror of nature, whose inextinguishable and essential powers are still personified as gods. The will of these gods was, to the Greek mind, capricious; they eyed human prosperity with jealousy, and punished by a Nemesis the exuberant and overweening satisfaction of human success. But it is extremely important to notice that behind and above both gods and men lay the inscrutable and omnipotent dominion of fate or necessity, the insoluble mystery which both men and gods might look up to and regard with a shudder of helpless apprehension. This inexplicable and awful Judge and Destroyer, holding in his hands the thread of every law and power in the universe, overshadowed the splendour and glory of the Greek pantheon, and lent an element of instability and change to palaces of Olympus as well as to the reign and dominion of Croesus or Darius. It seems as if here is the sole point on which religion, as we understand it, entered into the strange poetic creed of Hellenism, and by entering finally succeeded in destroying its charm and its spell of influence, and in drawing

the Greek intellect to those profound and long extended philosophical investigations in which final causes were sought after, but never discovered.

Dante wrote at an age when the intellectual world held that it had discovered all, and that all had become so clear and positive a possession of the human mind that the most abstruse questions of God's will and nature, man's moral constitution and eternal destiny, were capable of being treated of in poetry with as much clearness, interest, and vivacity as the battles of Hector, the storm-tossed galleys of *Æneas*, or the beauty and valour of Camilla.

Heaven, earth, the human heart, the nature of God, were all known in detail to the mind of the Middle Ages. The schoolmen, the theologians, the mystics, had explored hell, heaven, and humanity, and had drawn up a map of each region. Nothing is so wonderful to us to-day as the assumption of completeness in mediæval knowledge. Every question found an answer in the systems of Abelard and Aquinas. All the veils had been lifted and all the mysteries explained. The path of man to perfection

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was set forth in twenty infallible guide-books; his moral nature and obligations were discussed and decided to the minutest jot and tittle. Life, death, and the world beyond were logically and distinctly explained, and their explanations had saturated the popular mind and become part and parcel of popular knowledge and popular faith.

Dante found the theory ready made in the scholastic philosophy of his day, and in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. He made it the framework of his immortal poem. He found the system a dry, barren account of all that has interested the enquiry of man since the dawn of philosophy. He found the technical language of Aristotle borrowed and barbarised by the schoolmen of Paris, Oxford, and Cologne, and enlarged so as to comprehend and formulate the doctrines of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. By his remarkable genius he breathed into this skeleton shape the breath of life. He took the incidents of his own career, his political adventures, his acquaintance with books, with men, with the practical exercise of religion, with human passion, hate,

love, despair, sorrow, the love of life and the fear of death, and he arranged these phases of human experience and emotion under the categories of the schools, in their relation to God, to goodness, to divine wrath, and celestial reward, and the result is a vivid and passionate story of human life, interpreted by the system, ideas, and standards of the scholastic world. Dante, after Virgil, makes Minos the judge of the Inferno; but behind Minos stands Thomas Aquinas in the poet's mind. It is the spirit of scholastic philosophy and not the voice of Beatrice who explains to the poet the relation of the divine and human wills in the moral universe. It is mediæval theology and not Piccarda who gives that sublime explanation of human contentment among the varied gradations of felicity in heaven:

First gently smiled she, with that shadowy band,
Then answered me, with such a joyful mien,
That lit with love's first fire she seemed to stand,
" Brother, our will is ever kept serene
By virtue of the charity, which e'en
Makes us to wish for nought, but what we own,
Nor gives us thirst for more; for had we been

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Eager for higher place, we then had known
Discord with His wise will, who sets us here alone,

“Here thou shalt learn such discord cannot reign,
If here in charity we needs must be;
Whose nature thine enquiry will make plain
To thee; this blest existence asks that we
Keep with the will of God in harmony;
So that our wills He can to union plight;
And that in tier on tier our company
Should hold this realm, is still this realm’s delight,
As ’t is our King’s, Who doth His will with ours
unite.

“And His will is our peace, and this the sea
Towards which all things, created by that will,
Or made by nature, move in harmony.”¹

Scholastic philosophy and scholastic theology were united to produce a guide for Dante through the realms of Hades and Paradise. His confidence and unhesitating frankness sprang from the consciousness which he felt that knowledge incapable of error was a light unto his path. But Dante did not learn everything he knew from the schoolmen.

A man who wishes to know something about a foreign country will find out its distance from

¹ *Par.*, iii., 67-87.

the Equator and from the North Pole, and will deduce some particulars of its climate and its productions from these facts. He will study the map to discover its mountains, its rivers, and its towns. He will learn something of the race who inhabit it by examining their ethnological affinities. But if he wishes to know the people and the scenes, the cities and the buildings of the land without visiting it, he will read and listen to the narratives of travellers.

This is exactly the course taken by Dante in procuring materials for that journey which began at the gate of hell and ended in the upper circles of heaven. Moore published *Lalla Rookh*, in which Eastern lands are described in vivid detail, but Moore never left his study fireside to describe them with such marvellous fidelity. Southey composed *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama* without visiting either the steppes of Northern Asia or the streets of sacred Benares. When Henry Kingsley wrote his stories of Australian life he took all the details from Howitt's travels in the antipodes, and now most readers think

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that the novelist spent years in Queenstown and the bush, though he never crossed the line.

So Dante, in describing the unseen world, utilised the accounts which mystics and saints had left of their personal experiences in a visit to the world beyond the grave. Scholastic philosophy and scholastic theology taught the great Florentine poet the latitude and longitude of those mysterious regions and the character of the people who dwell there, and gave him not only a map, but a compass whose needle would direct him thither. He went elsewhere for details of colour, movement, and life.

We have infallible evidence that Dante was familiar with the vision of Frate Alberico, a monk of Monte Casino, the great Benedictine monastery in the latter half of the twelfth century. This noble monk, son of a baron, Lord of the Castle de' Sette Fratelli in the Campagna of Rome, fell into a trance, and was led by a dove to a place where he met St. Peter and two angels, who carried him to the lower regions, where he saw sinners in torment. Frate Alberico has furnished many details to

the *Divina Commedia* of Dante. That certain priest of Lisieux, who served the Church of St. Austin at Bonneval at the end of the eleventh century, and was afterwards known as Waldkin, bishop and confessor, also had an authentic vision, in which he saw the punishment of the wicked and talked with men he had known or heard of in life, who gave him messages for their surviving friends and relatives. St. Brandan of Ireland was also one who had returned from that bourn from which no travellers generally do return, with a host of traveller's tales about all he had seen. These three accounts of life beyond the tomb were eagerly read by the people, and were widely circulated. Dante, with consummate literary skill, has picked out all that could best serve the purpose of his poem, just as Henry Kingsley boasted he had picked out the plums from the account Howitt wrote of Australian landscape and life. Dante also drew from the much more literary productions of his teacher, Brunetto Latini.

The saint and confessor was considered an incontrovertible authority on such subjects. If

St. Paul was caught up to the third heaven, and St. John saw a vision of the New Jerusalem, why should not Alberico, Waldkin, and Brandan be credited as giving a faithful account of regions to which neither Herodotus nor Sir John Mandeville had ever penetrated?

Intermingled with the figures of Dante's Hell we do, of course, find many incidents of things derived from the fable and mythology of ancient Greece and Rome. This especially is the case in that part of the journey through which the Roman poet Virgil guides his Florentine brother and successor. Indeed Dante owns his debt to Virgil in a beautiful passage at the beginning of the *Commedia*, in which the Florentine says:

" And art thou then that Virgil, and that fount
Whence pours so wide a flood of eloquence? "
I answered him, abashed, with modest front;
" From thee all poets, light and eminence
Derive. Here let me find the recompense
Of all the studious care with which thy theme
I pored on. Thee I hail with reverence
Master and model, taught by thy sweet rhyme
The spirit of speech, which wins for me the ap-
plause of time."¹

¹ *Inf.*, i., 79-87.

It is of course from Virgil that he borrows the description he gives of Cerberus, although he adds a few grotesque features which would have been out of place in a poem of the Augustan age.

Lo! Cerberus, a fierce and hideous hound,
Barks like a dog, from out his triple throat,
Above the people 'neath these waters bound;—
A red-eyed monster, bearded like a goat;
His filthy elf-locks in the tempest float;
Huge is his paunch, his hands with talons foul.
I watched him as he clawed the shades and smote,
Quartered, and flayed them, while beneath the
scowl
Of that black sky of hail, like dogs the spirits howl.¹

It is from Virgil he transfers Minos to be the awardee of punishment to the lost. Charon, the river Styx, the Furies, the Minotaur, the Centaurs, the giant Geryon, the Harpies, and Sinon of Troy,—all these come from Virgil's writings. If we think they accord but ill with the incidents of a Christian poem, and are incongruous elements in a serious description of the future life of real personages like Celestine V., Francesca da Rimini, Judas Iscariot, and

¹ *Inf.*, vi., 13-21.

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Caiaphas, we must look upon them as mere excrescences intended to heighten the hideous and bizarre landscapes of horror and desolation. They are the gargoyles of a Christian edifice, more or less ugly, grotesque, and unreal representations, set up at intervals amid the figures of historic men and women—kings, martyrs, or saints. Or we may interpret them in one of the figurative senses which Dante says underlie all his words.

When Dante sent his poem to Can Grande della Scala, he wrote: “ This my work is composed with many meanings. The first is literal, the second allegorical or moral.”¹ The figure which is to be taken allegorically, or with a moral and practical significance, is sometimes put side by side with that of an historical or authentic person or event, just as we see in the blazoned capital letters in some ancient scroll, or in the tessellated hues of a stained-glass window, the emblem interwoven with the reality; the dove descends upon Jordan, the eagle stands by St. John, while fantastic flowers and dragons and birds of unreal hue and nat-

¹ *Epist.*, x., 7.

ure are twined and twisted round some picture of the Passion or the Annunciation on the parchment of an illuminated manuscript. Dante can be real and literal enough when he likes. Speaking to an Italian audience he uses the scenery of Italy to explain points in the scenery of the lower world. When he wishes to give an idea of the rough and broken edge over which lay the descent into the Seventh Circle of the Inferno, he describes a scene in Lombardy where rocks have been upheaved by earthquake, or rolled down from the cliffs, so as to form a flight of steps down to the banks of the Adige:

Such as that ruin, by an earthquake wrought,
Or by a buttress-crag's disastrous fall,
Which this side Trent Adige's current caught,
From the high mountain top, from which was
brought
Down to the plain the shattered cliff, whose slope
Makes pathway for the climbers.¹

When the poet, led by the centaur Nessus,
leaves the tyrants writhing in their lakes of
boiling blood, he gains the Thorny Wood,

¹ *Inf.*, xii., 5-9.

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which reminds him of the bitter salt marshes of the pestilential Maremma, south of the Arno.

No leafage green is in that place forlorn,
No branches smooth, but offshoots knobbed and
gnarled,
No apples, but the sharp and poisoned thorn.¹

The romance of Maremma is the story of Pia, whose treacherous husband, for whatever cause, placed her in his castle in these stagnant marshes, and there she died. She gives a brief and pathetic history of herself in the *Purgatorio*:

Remember me; I am the Pia, who,
Born in Siena, in Maremma died.
He knows it, who with ceremony due,
The jewelled spousal ring upon my finger drew.²

Dante remembers the Tuscan Apennines, in their bare, mossless rocks, when he describes Malebolge, “ Wholly of stone and of an iron colour.”³ When he sees Arnus, the Tuscan soothsayer, in torment, he recollects that this man had a cavern among the marbles of Carrara in the Etruscan Apennines, from whence he obtained, for purposes of augury, a clear

¹ *Inf.*, xiii., 4–6.

² *Purg.*, v., 133–137.

³ *Inf.*, xviii., 2.

view of the stars and sea.¹ Again it is by a reference to the arsenal at Venice that the poet explains to his readers the fissure marvellously dark in Malebolge, where sinners are tortured in boiling pitch.

And as in the Venetian arsenal,
In winter, they the pitch tenacious heat,
To mend their ships, and in the interval
When navigation ceases, and the fleet
Is harboured, their equipment they complete;
One caulks the sea-worn ribs, these, on the prow,
Those, on the stern, with thundering hammers
beat;
Some making oars, some cordage toil below,
Others, aloft, the main or mizzen sails bestow,
'T was thus, though not by fire, but art divine,
Boiled the dense pitch below the cavern's mouth,
Whose bank the fumes with foul encrustment line.²

It is from the hospital of Valdichiana, in the Maremma, that Dante draws his images of the pain and lamentation in Malebolge.

And as we reached the utmost dungeon crypt
Of Malebolge; and the dwellers there
Within the range of our clear vision slipped,
Discordant lamentations filled the air,

¹ *Inf.*, xx., 49.

² *Inf.*, xxi., 7-18.

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Like arrows, iron-tipped with grief and care,
They pierced me; so that straightway either ear
I covered with my hands; the dismal lair
Gave out such cries, such sobs, and wailings drear
As might the lazarus-house of Valdichiana hear,

If in the height of summer's heat were tost,
With all its denizens in one deep trench,
Sardinia's and Maremma's suffering host;
Such was the place and such the noisome stench
Exhaled as from deep-rotted limbs.¹

Montereggione, which is a picturesque old castle on a height near Siena, conspicuous for the towers which surrounded it, comes to the poet's mind when he sees the giants who stand fixed from their waist upwards on the plain between Malebolge and the infernal pit. A marvellous picture does Dante paint in the following words. He addresses Virgil:

My head I turned a little space aside
Thinking I saw high towers before me loom;
And, " Master, say what burg is this ? " I cried;
And he to me: " In peering through the gloom,
At too great distance, you as true assume
What wildering fancy leads you to descry

¹ *Inf.*, xxix., 40-51.

Illusively; but, if you nearer come,
These shapes will with more clearness reach your
eye,
Approach then with swift step your sense to verify."

Then said he, as he gently took my hand,
Or ere he saw me any nearer go,
" That it may seem less strange when close you
stand
Know that, not towers, but giants all arow,
Immersed, waist downward, in that pit of woe,
Beetle o'er yonder bank." As when a haze
Dissolves, the eye perceives new outlines grow
From out the gloom which thickened vapours raise,
So piercing with my glance the dark air's cloudy
maze,

And drawing nearer to the dusky bank,
All error vanished, and I shook with fear.
For as at Montereggio, rank on rank,
Above the circling bastion, towers appear,
So towered above that shore, in outline clear,
From waist to brow the giants terrible
Whom Jove still threatens, when heaven's upper
sphere
Rings with his thunder.¹

Perhaps nowhere have Dante's observation
and imagination combined to make so true and

¹ *Inf.*, xxxi., 28-45.

lively a simile as when he compared the giant stooping to take him up, to the leaning tower at Bologna, the Carisenda. To one standing beneath the tower and looking up, if a cloud passes over the tower in an opposite direction to that in which the tower stoops, the tower and not the cloud may appear to be moving.

As he who stands beneath the leaning side
Of Carisenda, looking upward, spies
A cloud above the sloping column glide
In heaven, and thinks a movement he descries
In the high tower; so to my startled eyes
Antæus seemed in stooping—¹

He paints with equal freshness and beauty
the morning and the evening sky:

The white dawn rises; morning vapours flee
Before its conquering splendour; and afar
I recognise the trembling of the sea.²

The expression, “ the trembling of the sea,” —or rather the tremor, or tremulousness of the sea, *il tremolar della marina*,—could only have originated with one who was painter as well as poet, and is given in that Keble’s translation

¹ *Inf.*, xxxi., 136–139.

² *Purg.*, i., 115–117.

of Æschylus's phrase,—“the many twinkling smile of ocean.”¹

When we read Dante's description of evening we feel how it loses in a translation:

'T was now the hour when lone seafarers prove
 The passion that their melting bosoms move
 When they to their sweet friends their farewell
 say;
 When each new pilgrim feels the throb of love,
 If he doth hear a bell ring far away,
 That seems as if it mourned over the dying day.²

Here we see the original of Gray's “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day”—and of Byron's

Soft hour! which wakes the wish and melts the heart
 Of those who sail the seas, on the first day
 When they from their sweet friends are torn apart;
 Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way,
 As the far bell of vesper makes him start,
 Seeming to weep the dying day's decay.
 Is this a fancy which our reason scorns?
 Ah! surely nothing dies but something mourns!³

¹ ποντίων τε κυμάτων ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα.—Æsch., P. V., 89, 90. Dind.

² *Purg.*, viii., 1.

³ Byron, *Don Juan*.

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It was doubtless from some woodland spot in the Valdarno that Dante has copied the following picture; he fringes it, however, with pine trees of Ravenna, and Ruskin calls it the sweetest piece of wood description that exists in literature. It is intended to represent the Earthly Paradise, where Virgil surrenders Dante to the guidance of the Countess Matilda.

That forest I was eager to explore
Within and all around—a grove divine,
That foliage thick and living verdure bore
Tempering the sunlight to these eyes of mine,
And as the desert's uttermost confine
I left, I entered, with slow lingering tread,
On soil that breathed around a scent benign;
Sweet was the breeze that all unchanging sped,
And in a gentle gale rustled around my head.

In it the branches meekly quivering swayed,
And, with one movement, bent towards the part
In which the Holy Mountain cast its shade;
Yet, from their balance true they did not start
So far as would forbid the birds their art
To practise, swinging on each topmost spray;
But, in the fulness of a rapturous heart,
Those hours of prime the little songsters praise,
'Mid leaves whose whisper low accompany their
lays.

'T is thus from branch to branch the sound increases

In the deep pine groves of Chiassi's shore,
Whene'er Sirocco Eolus releases;

And me, my languid steps already bore
So deep and far within that forest hoar,
I quite forgot my former entrance place;
And lo! a stream forbade me venture more,
Which towards the left, with gentle rippling pace,
Bent down the grassy blades that all its margin
grace.

All waters that on earth are purest known
Would seem to have some tincture, if compared
With this immaculate current; ever brown
In changeless shadow through the grove it fared;
Its face the rays of sun and moon had spared
To light upon, and though my lagging feet
Did cross it not, my eyes beyond it dared
To travel, and the colours rich and sweet
Of many a summer bloom with wondering glance
to greet.¹

What a vivid touch it is which tells us of the sights of myriads tormented rising up to "make the eternal air tremble."² The ice of the frozen circle is so thick that were a peak of the Apennines, that of Pietropana near Lucca,

¹ *Purg.*, xxviii., 1-36.

² *Inf.*, iv., 27.

to topple down upon it, "even at the edge
't would not have given a crack."¹ When
he ascended to the lunar circle with Beatrice
it seemed to Dante that a cloud had covered
them both, lucid, dense, solid, and polished,
"like a diamond which the sun had struck."²

But Dante's work abounds not only in these
quick, momentary transcripts from the scene
of nature; it is a gallery of portraits, human
faces and human forms thrown into every atti-
tude of agony, of passion, of beatific ecstasy.
Not only the scenes he knew but the people
he knew are represented. It could only have
been from a cursory examination of a small
portion of the poem that Lamartine came to
the conclusion that the *Divine Comedy* is a
poem exclusively of local interest, and consists
of a vindictive satire (*une espèce de satire venge-
esse*) written by a poet and politician on the
men and the parties against which he had
sworn hatred. There is some truth in that
other criticism of the same writer, that Dante
has written a Gazette of Florence for posterity.³

¹ *Inf.*, xxxii., 29.

² *Par.*, ii., 31.

³ Le Dante a fait le gazette florentine de la posterité.—*Notes
sur le Dante*, par Alphonse Lamartine.

It is indeed almost necessary to resuscitate the whole Florentine people, their hatreds, beliefs, and preferences, in order to understand the poem. But that we must understand the time before we can understand the poet is as true of Homer and Virgil as it is of Dante; it is even more true of Aristophanes. Yet the permanent elements in human character and experience, those underlying and unchangeable features of human life which lie at the heart of any great poem of any age, like the crimson jewels of the pomegranate enclosed in its rough and bitter rind, make it worth while to break through the hard and resisting husk of the poem, and to master details whose knowledge clears away the obscurities that, once removed, reveal to us an ever fresh and fascinating picture of life, whether it be in Troy or Ithaca, in Athens or Florence. There we discern living, breathing men and women, in the drama of whose lives we find a hundred reflections of our own time, a hundred thoughts expressed and ideals delineated, a hundred actions and sufferings, a hundred lofty examples, which make us feel the fellowship of a

common humanity, the sympathy of a common lot. The great joy and comfort of literature felt by the faithful student is like the incentive and enthusiasm which animates the most rearward squadron of an army in a vast field of battle where all are listening to the same trumpet call and all hearts are beating to the same emotions, the same hopes, and the same fears.

It is true that Dante has fixed in the eternal opprobrium or the eternal praise of his pages a vast number of his contemporaries, afflicted or beatified in accordance with their cultivation of the vices or virtues whose consequences in a future life the poet wished to suggest. But he has set side by side with them many real and traditional characters who were known to him only in the pages of history. When someone asked the poet why he had cast into the Inferno so many Christians and so few who knew not Christianity, he replied that he had met more Christians in his life than unbelievers. This is quite sufficient answer, and quite consistent.

But the countrymen whom Dante saw in that marvellous journey of the imagination, the whole world has since looked upon, in Dante's

recital, with absorbing and unwearied interest. Celestine, whose great refusal placed him among those melancholy souls who lived without infamy or praise¹; Francesca and Paolo, swept on by the gusts of the infernal hurricane²; Ciacco, obscure but for his infamy³; Filippo Argenti, the rich and arrogant man who quarrelled with Dante in the streets of Florence, and now meets-him in the Inferno, half smothered in mire⁴—were all contemporaries of the poet. Farinata, the enemy, yet saviour of Florence, who rises from his tomb of fire erect “with breast and front,” as if he held hell in vast scorn⁵; Cavalcanti, thinking, even in torment, of his son⁶; the poet Guido,⁷—all these were men of Tuscany. So were the suicides, Pier della Vigna⁸ and Lano,⁹ and Jacopo da Sant’ Andrea¹⁰; so was the flatterer Alessio Interminei¹¹; wherever we turn we find Tuscans, of Florence, Pisa, Pistoia, Lucca, and Siena,

¹ *Inf.*, iii., 59.

⁶ *Inf.*, x., 53.

² *Inf.*, v., 73.

⁷ *Inf.*, x., 63.

³ *Inf.*, vi., 52.

⁸ *Inf.*, xiii., 98.

⁴ *Inf.*, viii., 61.

⁹ *Inf.*, xiii., 120.

⁵ *Inf.*, x., 35.

¹⁰ *Inf.*, xiii., 133.

¹¹ *Inf.*, xviii., 132.

from the arch-traitor Ugolino in the Circle of Frost,¹ to the alchemist Griffolino writhing among the lepers.² In the Purgatorio is the musician Casella,³ who began to sing one of Dante's own canzone which he had set to music. There we find Buonconte, who died at Campaldino,⁴ and Pia, the murdered wife,⁵ and Sordello the troubadour,⁶ Matilda⁷ and Beatrice,—all contemporaries of the poet. It is only when we enter the Paradiso that the personal and local elements grow less obtrusive. Thenceforth we meet Piccarda, the sister of Gemma Donati,⁸ Thomas Aquinas,⁹ and Buonaventura,¹⁰ and the spirits of other theologians and fathers of the Church, until we reach the White Rose of Paradise, and St. Bernard points out the various orders of saintly worshippers who are ranged tier on tier amid the petals of the mystic flower.¹¹

) The materials out of which Dante wrote his

¹ *Inf.*, xxxiii., 13.

⁶ *Purg.*, vi., 74.

² *Inf.*, xxix., 109.

⁷ *Purg.*, xxxiii., 119.

³ *Purg.*, ii., 91.

⁸ *Par.*, iii., 49.

⁴ *Purg.*, v., 88.

⁹ *Par.*, x., 99.

⁵ *Purg.*, v., 133

¹⁰ *Par.*, xii., 107.

¹¹ *Par.*, xxii.

great work were furnished by scholasticism, by the visions of ecstasies and mystics, by Holy Scripture, and the poems of Virgil and other authors. These elements are, however, suffused with his own overpowering personality, as wrapped up in the places he has seen, the people he has known, the events in his boyhood which he has witnessed, or in which he has taken part. There are traces, moreover, of the influence exercised over his mind by the songs of troubadours and the babble and proverbs of the market-place. His imagination is at the same time chastened and moulded by the constant sight of such architectural beauty and symmetry as were developed in the Italian cathedral; the devout repose of statues with folded hands or downcast eyes; the kneeling figures with gilded nimbus and trailing robe which graced the religious frescos of Giotto,—all these manifestations of austere and yet entrancing grace had set their stamp upon the poetic character of Alighieri.

His exercise of the poetic art witnessed to this. He builds his triple poem with the same

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exact and measured proportion as that in which Arnolfo casts the lines of the Duomo. For three to Dante is the root of the perfect number, nine.¹ His poem is divided into three parts, and the music of his verse has a triple echo in the smooth-flowing current of his *terza rima*.

There is one characteristic of Dante's poetic style which has always struck me as most worthy of notice; it is that mentioned by Longinus, or rather in the treatise on the Sublime attributed to that Greek rhetorician. This judicious writer states that sublimity is attained when the salient and essential details are picked out from any incident or object to be described, and are grouped together swiftly, tersely, and with energy. As an example of this the writer cites a famous poem of Sappho. The well-known poem, *The Twa Corbies*, is an example in English. Dante excels in this finest of descriptive and poetic perfections, as I hope I shall be able to show when I proceed to consider his work in detail.

But Dante's use of language is always re-

¹ *Vita Nuova*, § 30.

markable. He describes a thing or an incident as if he were looking at it. There is something often startling in this vivid actuality. His journey is depicted in what sounds like the itinerary of a scientific explorer. He is a strict economist of words. As a French critic says, "he is an enemy to the phrase." That love of the phrase, which we are told is vitiating the style of modern Parisian writers, is impossible to Dante. So terse, so concise, so utterly averse to amplification or the comment, even of an epithet, is he, that readers are apt to stumble over his meaning from the very fact of its being too obvious for their apprehension. Sometimes the delicate tenuity of his expression seems to glide into elusive innuendo, elusive only to us because we are not Tuscans of the fourteenth century. At the same time he is complete master of all degrees of poetic feeling, tenderness, and insight that are concentrated in the seer, the sage, and the singer. The language of Dante seems to me, after accurate study of the best models of Greece and Rome, to be the closest vesture that was ever fitted to the soul of man, the clearest and most

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transparent medium through which a vivid and magnificent intelligence has ever thrown its light abroad upon the world. We see him in his meaning and his mind as if his language were merely the jewel-like atmosphere by which himself and Beatrice found themselves surrounded when they entered the Circle of the Moon, and, in his own words,

It seemed as if a cloud had o'er us spread,
Bright, dense, unriven, and such a light it shed,
As might a diamond stricken by the sun.¹

¹ *Par.*, ii., 31-33.





CHAPTER III

“ THE INFERNO ”

THE three books of Dante's great work are closely connected with each other. Before we can understand this connection thoroughly, it is necessary to consider that according to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, which was believed to be the true system in Dante's day, the earth was the centre of the universe, and the sun and planets revolved round this centre. The Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso were situated within the area of this system. The old fable is that when Satan was cast out from heaven he fell to earth, the earth recoiled from contact with the foul fiend, and a hollow cavern, passing through the earth's centre, was produced by this recoil. This cavern with its nine circles was Hell. At

the extreme bottom of this pit the earth bulged out into a mountain, the Mount of Purgatory, on the summit of which was the Earthly Paradise. Beyond this hill were different circles of Heaven, the circle of the Moon, of Venus, of Mars, and the remaining planets, inhabited by the blessed, and beyond all was the Empyrean, the seat of God's visible presence.

This is a brief outline of Dante's idea of the universe.

The subject of the present chapter is the poet's description of the lowest of all divisions of the unseen world. For it is of the unseen world that Dante has written, that unseen world which he seems to intimate is the only real world, stretching as it does through all space, and occupying all heaven and earth, and extending its frontiers from the pit of hell to the throne of God.

Dante in his poem finds himself in the middle of life's path, *i. e.*, when he is just thirty-five years old, in a dark and tangled wood. Terror and anxiety oppress him, and he can find no way to reach the mountain heights which he sees just illuminated by the breaking dawn, for

three wild creatures, a panther, a wolf, and a lion, stand in his way: the vices of the world beset him and hinder his arrival at the serene heights of contemplation and peace.

Here it is that he meets Virgil, who is sent to be his guide. Virgil was in the Middle Ages regarded as only second to Aristotle, whom Dante calls "the master of those who know." One of Virgil's poems was considered to contain a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, and the Latin poet was held to be almost Christian in the tenderness and sweetness of his poetic character. We have seen already how Dante addresses him in the terrible and dreary wood. He is his master, the imparter to him of that beauteous Tuscan style which won him fame.

Throughout the whole of his journey through the abyss of Hell, Dante speaks in the most reverent and affectionate terms of the guide whom he styles "the good" master, "my dear leader," "the famous sage."

It is upon Virgil he depends for safety from the wild beasts which beset his path, and if these creatures represent the passions of life,

Dante seems to imply that the power of reason, as typified by Virgil, would enable him to subdue the foes that would imperil his spiritual safety.

But Virgil tells him that before these foes of his peace are to be vanquished he must learn the frightful consequences of sin by going into the dark abode where sin is being punished; that he must then learn repentance on the Hill of Purgatory, for not before then will he be prepared for the Beatific Vision in heaven.

“ I therefore deem that it is best for thee
To follow me, for I will be thy guide,
Through the eternal realm of misery,
Where thou shalt hear the lamentations, void
Of hope, in which the ancient spirits chide,
Complaining as the second death they taste;
And thou shalt visit those who do abide
Within the fire, and there contented rest,
Hoping some happy day to join the people blest;

If thither to ascend is in thy heart,
I to a soul more worthy far than I,
Will leave thy guidance sure, when I depart.”¹

This soul more worthy is, of course, Beatrice,

¹ *Inf.*, i., 112-123.

who shall conduct the poet through the abodes of the blessed.

Dante consents to accompany Virgil. His courage has revived since he learned that Beatrice sent Virgil to be his guide and waits herself to lead him to Paradise.

As flowerets drooping from the chill of night
That closed them, soon as e'er the radiant sun
Beams o'er them, on their stems erect and bright
And fully blown appear, at once begun
My courage to revive, and quickly run,
Even to my heart, the fire of enterprise;
Then said I, like to some intrepid one,
“ Oh, she was pitiful who thus did rise
To help, and no less courteous thou, my leader
wise,

“ Who didst so promptly follow her behest!
Thou by thy words hast so inflamed my heart
To this adventure, that at once I rest
In my first resolution; therefore start,
And in one will let both of us have part—
Thou leader, lord, and master in the quest.”
‘T was thus I spoke to him, and he alert
Moved onward, while behind him following fast
The deep and savage path I entered on at last.¹

The gate of Hell is soon reached, and written

¹ *Inf.*, ii., 127 *ad fin.*

in sombre colour over it the poet sees the following words—whose sense, he complains, was hard to him.

In the original, the words seem to ring out like the tolling of a terrible bell:

Through me is reached the city sorrow-tost;
Through me the regions of eternal pain;
Here lies the pathway 'mid the people lost;
My mighty builder Justice did ordain,
Omnipotence divine and Wisdom's reign
Supreme, and Primal Love did me create;
And nought created does the world contain,
Unless eternal, me to antedate.
All hope abandon ye, who enter through this gate.¹

The Hell of Dante is thus set on the foundation of Justice, Wisdom, and Love, and the reconciliation of these three divine attributes in the building of an eternal prison-house, from which hope should be excluded, is the great enigma still, as it was to the Florentine poet.

It is to the sound of unnumbered sighs, shrieks, and groans that they enter the place of sorrow. The tongues of every race, the execrations of every nation ring in their ears.

¹ *Inf.*, iii., 1-9.

Cries of agony, storms of anger, voices shrill and hoarse, and the sound of beaten breasts make such tumult in that air of eternal blackness that it seems as if they suddenly found themselves at the heart of a whirlwind. Dante bursts into a flood of tears.

On passing the gate of Hell, the two poets meet first "the people dolorous" who have foregone the good of intellect, *i. e.*, God, the only subject for human contemplation. The air without a star resounds with the complaints of these scoffers. First of all they find those who have lived in indifference, doing neither good nor evil. Among them is Pope Celestine V., who made through cowardice the "great refusal"—and gave up the glorious office of pope from a spirit of fear. The profound earnestness of Dante's character was never more plainly exhibited than in the contempt he here manifests for the inefficient mediocrity of the lukewarm and the slothful. Here the poet meets Charon, who is carrying the spirits across Acheron to the eternal shades in heat and frost. The helpless self-abandonment with which this evil brood of Adam suffer themselves to be taken

on board the boat of Charon is thus finely depicted :

And as, in autumn, slowly fluttering fall
The leaves, until the bough sees earthward strown
Those tresses of the woodland, at that call,
Prompt as the falcon to the lure, are thrown
Into the boat the evil race who own
Adam as father; and pursue their way
Across the darksome billow.¹

The horror of the scene is intensified by a sudden earthquake and a storm, and Dante swoons :

And from the land of tears there came a blast
Of tempest, and a flash of ruddy light,
Which reft me of my every sense, and cast
A swoon upon me, strong as sleep.²

He wakes up to find himself on the edge of an abysmal valley dolorous, that gathers the thunder of infinite lamentations. The place was obscure, profound, and nebulous. In the foremost circle rose a tempest of sobs that made the eternal air tremble. This place was Limbo, where there was sorrow without torment felt by those who had died without bapt-

¹ *Inf.*, iii., 112-118.

² *Inf.*, iii., 133 *ad fin.*

ism, or without serving the god they knew as they ought to have served him. Among these Virgil reckons himself:

Then the good master asked: “ Dost thou demand
Who is it form this Ghostly Company ?
Now know, before thou farther go, this band
Have never sinned, and yet their piety,
Since baptism, the gate of sanctuary
In Holy Church, they had not, failed to appease
Their God, and those whose fate it was to die
Ere Christ had come, did not by worship please
The Power Supreme, and I myself was one of
these.

“ 'T is for this fault, and for no crime beside,
That we are lost, and yet our only pain
Is that in ceaseless longing we abide,
In longing without hope.” ¹

Here is the castle of Philosophy, whose pursuits and denizens are thus exquisitely described :

Under a noble castle's foot we went,
Seven times by walls encompassed, while around,
A lovely rivulet its waters sent;
We crossed this flood, as if on solid ground,
And passing portals seven an entrance found
Amid the sages, on a meadow green

¹ *Inf.*, iv., 31-42.

And fresh; and many folk within its bound
Were walking slow and solemn, in whose mien
The placid stamp of great authority was seen.

Rarely they spoke, and with an accent soft;
And we ourselves withdrawing to a place
High up and clearly lighted, from aloft
Saw every one there gathered, face to face.
For opposite to us my eye could trace
The lineaments of spirits eminent,
The sight of whom was glory.¹

He enumerates among those he meets many
of the noblest names of Greek and Roman
antiquity.

But the serene atmosphere breathed by poets
and sages is soon exchanged for a more awful
scene. The two poets reach the second circle,
where the victims of sinful passion are tor-
mented.

Mute of all light the spot that thence I gain,
Yet clamorous as a tempest on the deep,
When winds contend; the hellish hurricane,
That never rests, in its resistless sweep,
Hurtles the spirits on toward the steep,
With bitter torture, whirling them around
And buffeting, while loud they wail and weep
And curse the Power Divine.²

¹ *Inf.*, iv., 106-120.

² *Inf.*, v., 28-36.

Here Dante relates in his own inimitable manner the story of Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo. They were both put to death by Francesca's husband within Dante's own memory.

Dante tells the tale in accents of profound pity, at the same time with the full sense of the hopeless and unalterable necessity which rules the dreary consequences of human error. The two lovers walk the place of torture hand in hand, weeping and lamenting in despair, and yet bound together in the closest links of human affection. Francesca speaks:

“ Love that on gentle hearts so soon descends,
He for my gracious body felt, since then
Rapt from me, by a crime that still offends;
Love, that can make the loved one love again,
Seized too on me so strongly, that we twain,
Still faithful share this torment, side by side;
‘T was love that did for us one death obtain;
Our murderer yet shall taste Caina’s tide ”;
Such were the words in which the lovely ghost
replied.

Soon as the tones of each resentful shade
Had reached me, I cast down my face, and low
I held it, till the poet question made:

"What ponderest thou?" "Alas, how swift a
flood

Of passion; what sweet dreams to such deep woe
Have sunk then," said I, turning to the twain;

"Your bitter pangs, Francesca, like a blow
Have struck me," I began, "'til I am fain
To weep for sadness sore, and pity of your pain.

"Yet say how those sweet sighs to bliss did bring,
And by what turn and in what manner love
Gave you fruition of your wavering
Desires." And she to me—"No pang can move
The heart in its calamity above
The pang that comes with thought of past delight;
Yes, and your master well the truth can prove.
But since you crave from me to learn aright
How our love's hidden root burst up into our sight,

"I'll be as one who tells 'mid tears that scald
His cheek; for one day in delight we read
Of Lancelot bold, whose bosom love enthralled;
Yes, and we were alone, and never dread
Of a discovery touched us; yet oft fled
The colour from our cheeks, as sometimes met
Our glances while the hours of reading sped;
But our undoing I can ne'er forget;
'T was when the tale had told how that sweet kiss
was set

"On lips that longed for it, by such a knight,
That he who ne'er from me has parted been,

Kissed me on lips that trembled with delight;
 The volume and its writer were, I ween,
 Our Galeotto, and our go-between,—
 For in the book that day no more we read.”
 Her consort with a shriek of anguish keen
 Greeted her words, and all my senses fled
 For pity, and to earth I fell, as falls the dead.¹

The third circle is the place of eternal rain.
 Here huge hail, and water sombre-hued, and
 snow athwart the tenebrous air pour down.
 Here are the Gluttonous; among whom is
 Ciacco the Florentine, who thus makes confession:

He said to me, “Thy city which is filled
 With envy, like a sack that overflows,
 Once held me in its tranquil life, well skilled
 In dainties, and a glutton, and by those
 Who dwelt there Ciacco called; but now the blows
 Of this fierce rain avenge my wasteful sin.
 Sad as I am, full many another knows
 For a like crime like penalty within
 This circle”; and more word he spake not.²

In the fourth circle the poet comes upon
 the Avaricious and Prodigal — rolling heavy

¹ *Inf.*, v., 100 *ad fin.*

² *Inf.*, vi., 49–57.

weights. In the fifth circle are the Irascible and the Sullen.

Fixed in the mud they cry, “ In the sweet air
Which the sun cheers, we ever lived in gloom,
While in ourselves the sullen cloud we bear;
Now in this sable mire it is our doom
To dwell morose ”; this strain they then resume
Perpetually, through their gurgling throats
Repeating inarticulate.¹

One of the sublimest figures in the *Inferno* is that of Farinata degli Uberti, the great Ghibelline who led his party against the Guelphs of Florence in the battle of Monte Aperto in 1260. Dante places him among Heresiarchs in the sixth circle, because he was of the same opinion as Epicurus, “ who with the body mortal makes the soul.” When the triumphant Ghibellines determined that the walls of Florence were to be laid to the ground, Farinata withstood, single-handed, the cruel proposition and succeeded in saving the city. Dante describes the Heresiarchs and their punishment as follows:

¹ *Inf.*, vii., 121-126.

Soon as I was within, I cast around
 My eyes, and saw extend on either hand
 A spacious plain, that echoed to the sound
 Of grief and torment sore; as o'er the land
 At Arles where Rhone's vast waters stagnant
 stand,
 Or Pola, near Quarnero Bay that bounds
 And bathes the line of Italy, expand
 Plains rough and heaving with sepulchral mounds,
 'T is thus the plain, wherein I stood, with tombs
 abounds.

Save that the buried were more grimly treated,
 For 'twixt the graves were scattered tongues of
 fire,
 By which to such a pitch the place was heated
 That iron could no fiercer flame require
 For art to mould it; lamentations dire
 Issued from each unlidded vault, and seemed
 The voice of those in torment.¹

From one of these fiery tombs Farinata

With breast and forehead rose upright
 As if even Hell he held in uttermost despite.*

He proceeds to boast of having saved Florence:

¹ *Inf.*, ix., 109-123.

² *Inf.*, x., 34-35.

When all decreed that Florence should be laid
 In ruin I alone with fearless face
 Defended her.¹

The seventh circle is taken up by the Violent. Here is the River of Blood, within which boiling is “whoe'er by violence did injure others.”² Here are the terrible Centaurs. Thousands and thousands of these monsters go about the moat shooting with shafts whatever soul emerges out of the blood more than his crime allows. Here the poets cross the dismal Wood of Thorns and the Sand Waste, beaten for ever by a rain of fire.

Thick arid sand the ground was, such as trod
 The feet of Cato. Ah! how sorely feared
 For ever shouldst thou be, vengeance of God,
 By those who read what to mine eyes appeared.
 For crowds of souls I saw, naked and seared,
 And all in miserable anguish crying;
 Most at full speed across the sand careered,
 Some crouching sat,—each sufferer complying
 With his doom's set decree; and some supine were
 lying.

¹ *Inf.*, x., 91–93.

² *Inf.*, xii., 47.

³ Africa.

Few were the prostrate ones, yet was their wailing
 More passionate; while o'er the torrid waste,
 Fire-flakes of swelling bulk were downward sailing
 As on an Alp, unbuffeted by blast,
 The sullen snow descends.¹

In the eighth circle Malebolge (foul pits, or pockets) is reached, a place thus described :

A place in hell is Malebolge called,
 All stone, and iron-hued, as is the line
 Of masonry, by which it is enwalled;
 Plumb in the centre of the plain malign
 Gapes deep and wide this well, whose full design
 I purpose in due order to expound,
 Between the deep hard rampart and this mine
 Extend the bulwark of a circle's mound,
 And in its lowest depths, are twice five valleys
 found.

And as where line on line the moats invest
 A castle for defence; so rank on rank
 These valleys furrow the accursèd nest;
 And as in fortresses the bridge's plank
 Runs from each threshold to the farthest bank,
 So from the cliffs did broken scaurs extend
 Across the moats and mounds on either flank,
 And in the lowest gulf conveying end.²

These pits, or valleys, are peopled respect-

¹ *Inf.*, xiv., 13-30.

² *Inf.*, xviii., 1-18.

ively with the Fraudulent, Seducers, Flatterers, Simoniacs, Soothsayers, Peculators, Hypocrites, Thieves, Evil Counsellors, Schismatics, Alchemists, and Forgers. Amid the tormented myriads of this pit the poet presses on and is filled with horror and dread at the sight of the giants, Nimrod, Ephialtes, and Antæus, ranged like towers, waist upwards, on the rim of the abyss. By the last named the two poets are transported to the ninth circle. The horror of the poem culminates at this point. Here is the frozen lake of Cocytus.

As thro' Caina's shadowy pit we crossed
Beneath the giant's feet, at the high wall
I still gazed, till my guide did me accost:
 “ Heed well thy steps, or else thy tread will fall
 Upon the heads of brethren wretched all,
 And by eternal torment sore distressed.”
 I as my eyes turned downward at his call,
Saw 'neath my feet a lake extend, whose breast
Not water's semblance bore, but that of glass ex-
 pressed.

Not Austrian Danube, in the winter's gloom,
Nor Tanais, beneath a chillier blast,
Could in their course so thick a crust assume
 As here I saw; had Tampernich¹ been cast,

¹ Supposed to be a hill near Tovernich, in Austria.

Or Pietrapana,¹ on that surface vast,
Even at the bank had not a crack appeared;
And as when maidens glean, the harvest past,
With muzzle out of water oft is heard
The croaking frog,—so blue, waist upward, were
upreared

The shades lamenting in the bed of ice,
While with the notes of storks they gnashed their
teeth.²

In this frozen lake the poet finds Count Ugolino of Pisa side by side with his political rival, the Archbishop Ruggieri, with whom he struggled for the headship of the Ghibelline party, and by whom he was defeated. Ultimately Ugolino, his two sons, and two grandsons, were confined in the tower of Famine at Pisa, and the key of the prison door was thrown into the Arno. Ugolino tells his story in the following terrific passage, one of the passages of Dante which are unique in literature:

I saw two frozen together in one well
So that one forehead like a cowl o'erlaid
The other, and as by bread men seek to quell
The pangs of hunger, so the topmost shade
Upon his foe with teeth an onslaught made,

¹ A hill in Tuscany.

² *Inf.*, xxxii., 16–37.

Just where the nape is welded to the head;
Not other was the fury once displayed
By Tydeus against Menalippus dead,
Than that with which this soul on his companion
fed.

“ O thou who showest by such bestial sign
Thy hate for him thou makest thus thy food,
Tell me the cause,” I said, “ with this design:
That if thy charge of evil thou make good,
And speak thy name, and say what act of blood
He sinned in, I may yield return to thee,
In that bright upper world where once ye stood;
Unless, eer from this path my feet be free,
The instrument of speech be withered up in me.”¹

His mouth from that grim feast the shade forlorn
Uplifted, wiping it upon the hair
Which clothed the head he from behind had torn;
And thus began: “ You would that my despair
And grief I should renew, that ever tear
My heart in thinking on, or, ere I break
Silence—but if my speech be seed to bear
The fruit of infamy to him I wreak
Revenge on, you shall learn, though thro’ my tears
I speak.

“ Tho’ who thou art, and what device of thine
Has brought thee here below, ’t is not for me
To guess,—thine accent proves thee Florentine.

¹ *Inf.*, xxxii., 125 *ad fin.*

Thou then must learn that I, who speak to thee,
Was the Count Ugolino, and that he
Beside me was Ruggieri; I will tell
Why I bide near him; tho' how treachery
And evil thoughts of his their purpose fell
Wrought in my captive death, report has taught
thee well.

" But what thou couldst not know from mortal
tongue,
Namely, what cruel death did me befall,
Hear thou; and learn if he have done me wrong.
The narrow loop in the mew's prison wall,
Which men, on my account, of Famine call,
And where 't is meet that others still must pine,
Some moons had shown me thro' the embrasure
small,
When lo! I had an evil dream; a sign,
Parting the veil that hid the future's face from
mine.

" I thought I saw this wretch, in power elate,
Pursue a wolf and cubs on that high ground,
That blocks from Lucca's view the Pisan state.
With many a lean but eager crafty hound,
Ghualandi and Sismondi soon were found,
Lanfranchi too, in speed pre-eminent;
Till sire and sons, on flight too laggard bound,
It seemed to me were baffled and o'erspent,
And with those savage fangs their flanks were
pierced and rent.

“ When I awoke before the morn, that day,
I heard my little sons, who shared my cell,
For bread, even in their slumber, moaning pray;
Hard art thou, if unmoved thou hearest me tell
The message that my heart had guessed too well!
If this thou feel not, what can make thee feel?
And when we all were risen, the hour befell
At which was brought to us the morning meal,
Yet each one doubted sore what might their dreams
reveal.

“ And as the locking of the gate I heard
Beneath that terrible tower, I gazed alone
Into my children’s face, without a word.
I wept not, for within I turned to stone;
But saw that they were weeping every one;
’T was then my darling little Anselm cried:
‘ You look so, father!—Say, what have they
done?’
Still not a tear I shed, nor word replied
That day, nor till that night in next day’s dawning
died.

“ And as there shot into this prison drear
A little sunbeam, by whose light I caught
My look upon four faces mirrored clear;
Both of my hands I bit, by grief o’erwrought.
Then suddenly they rose as if they thought
I did it hungering; ‘ Less our misery,’
They cried, ‘ should’st thou on us feed, who are
nought

But creatures vested in our flesh by thee;
Then strip away the weeds that still thine own
must be.'

" I calmed me to make them feel less their fate;
Two days we spent in silence all forlorn;
Earth, Earth, oh wherefore wert thou obdurate,
And would'st not open! On the following morn
Gaddo, before my face, from life was torn!
' Can you not help me, father ? ' first he cried,
And perished; then I saw the younger born,
Three, one by one, fall eer the sixth day sped—
Plainly as you see me, and this accursed head.

" Already blind, I fondly grope my way
To them, and for three days their names I call
After their death; then famine found its prey
And did what sorrow could not." This was all
He said; and, as his sidelong glances fall
On the vile skull, he seized it once again,
Dog-like, with teeth the very bone would maul.
Ah, Pisa! thou opprobrium of the plain,
Whose people softly breathe the *Si*, if 't is in vain
To hope thy neighbours would thy crime reprove,
At least let those two islands of the sea,¹
Caprara and Gorgona, nearer move,
And dam the mouth of Arno; till in thee
Each living soul be drowned. If verily

¹ Gorgona and Caprara are two islands at the mouth of the Arno. The former of them when viewed from the tower of Pisa seems to dam the river.

Count Ugolino his pledged faith forswore,
And sold thy fortresses by treachery,
His sons at least should not the bitter cross have
bore.¹

The ninth circle contains traitors of all sorts.
In its lowest depths are Lucifer, who was false
to God in heaven, Judas Iscariot, Brutus, and
Cassius.

Here the journey ends. The poet and his
guide issue from the realm of darkness by a
secret path leading from the centre of the
earth.

A place there is beneath the station drear
Of Beelzébub, which as far extends
As hell itself, yet not by sight 't is clear
But by the clue a murmuring streamlet lends,
Which through the fissure deep of a huge rock
descends,

Eating its quiet way for many a year;
The guide and I that hidden road to test,
And in the bright world eager to appear,
Leave thoughts of weariness and dreams of rest
And that steep rugged pathway boldly breast,
Till, thro' a rounded tunnel's narrow door,
I see the sky in all its beauty dressed,

¹ *Inf.*, xxxiii., 1-87.

And thence the road we eagerly explore
And issuing to the world behold the stars once
more.¹

What a change from the confusion, sorrow,
and despair of that dark, sunless prison-house
to the bright world where they came forth to
re-behold the stars!

It is not by accident that the last line of each of the three parts, the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso* contains a reference to the stars. Dante had been offered a return to Florence on ignominious terms, but he replied that if Florence could not be re-entered honourably by him, it should never be entered at all. And then he proceeds: "What! shall I not everywhere enjoy the light of the sun and stars? and may I not seek and contemplate, in every corner of the earth, under the canopy of heaven, consoling and delightful truth?"

The *Inferno* of his own life and exile closed in the consolations which the stars, images of hope, of aspiration, of celestial peace, continuously suggested to him. It was his old teacher

¹ *Inf.*, xxxiv., 127 *ad fin.*

who said to him in the vision, “ If thou follow thy star, thou shalt not fail of a glorious haven.”¹

I think every reader of the *Inferno* draws a breath of relief when with Dante he finishes the dark journey through the circles and ledges of Hell. Dante himself impresses upon us the agony and fear he suffered during the passage. He turns pale; he staggers, and is only prevented from falling into a swoon by the strong arms of Virgil. “ He falls as fall the dead.”² “ The many people, and the divers wounds, these eyes of mine had so inebriated,” he exclaims, “ that they were wishful to stand still and weep.”³

The whole place was full of sights and sounds and sufferings that vividly impress the mind with the idea of human wickedness in all its maddening and detestable manifestations; all the train of ruin, pain, fire, and blood which the rebellious human will brings upon itself. Human conscience, whose scope was deeper than hell, whose capacity for agony and remorse, for shame and torment, was vaster than

¹ *Inf.*, xv., 55.

² *Inf.*, v., 142.

³ *Inf.*, xxiv., 1.

the whole nine circles of the pit, whose original destiny was to reflect and to seek the placid happiness whose seat was beyond the farthest star, instead of this had chosen the nether darkness of the infernal tempest. The wretched creatures whom Dante's fancy saw undergoing suffering of every sort were merely men and women who had missed that "good of the intellect" which it was the passion of the poet's life to follow, and their sufferings were neither more nor less than the self-inflicted scourges with which the perverted will visits the victim of uncurbed passions and stirs to sleepless agony the life that has been without love, hope, or humility.

The punishments awarded in Dante's *Inferno* are the logical and natural consequences of the several sins that are visited. The sinner is at once his own judge and executioner. There is something amazing in the vastness and complexity of Dante's Hell, the magnificence of human expiation, the overflowing sum of suffering which human error pays down in retribution to that Wisdom, Love, and Justice it has affronted or outraged. The Pusillanimous,

goaded by wasps and hornets, restlessly pursue a whirling flag. They are those who fail in strength of will, and are carried on at the will of others, the sport of circumstance or fortune. Those who, as Dante says, subjugate reason to appetite are driven through the darkened air, borne on the blast like a flock of cranes, hither, thither, up, down; a realistic symbol of souls lost in the windy gusts of passion.

The Heresiarchs, who deny the immortality of the soul, live in tombs of torment, for life to them is only the torture of death deferred. Murderers, Tyrants, and Robbers seethe in the blood through which they have waded and in which their hands are steeped. The Gloomy Wood is a fit place for the dreary Suicide, pursued by hell-dogs no less cruel than the despairing imaginations that hounded him on to the noose or the poniard. The Thieves are continually being metamorphosed into serpents, secret, subtile, and envenomed. The Schismatics who have rent the Church are now, in retaliation, cloven asunder themselves. The Hypocrites wear the eternal mantle of lead which they have assumed, the

intolerable cloak that tires and wears them out. The Glutton has his nature steeped in turbid waters, drenched with chilly snows, and racked with the fever of bodily disease. The Avaricious and the Prodigal, who struggle to gain property or to save it for the sake of spending it in self-indulgence, are rolling heavy weights by pushing with their chests, now this way, now that. The Wrathful and the Melancholy lie in the bog of Styx, naked and sullen. The whole of the punishments in the Inferno are such as the sin itself in every case would produce. This is the eternal hell of Dante before which there were no created things. The eternal hell which must result from the constitution of our race, half dust, half deity. The eternal hell of human will distorted through ignorance or blindness from the divine will and suffering the consequences of woe and pain and unrest. For "in His will is our peace."

Dante wrote on the portal of his Hell, "All hope abandon ye, who enter here." I doubt whether he knew the large assumption he was making in placing such an inscription there. Has Dante succeeded in excluding hope from

his Inferno ? At any rate, he has not excluded pity. There is nothing more remarkable than the profound compassion felt by the poet for those he meets in this imaginary underworld. The word he generally uses to express his experience is pity ; it is the passion of pity that conquers him when he looks upon the white, blasted faces, the writhing forms, the distorted features, and hears the ceaseless shrieks and lamentations of despair that fill the sunless cavern pits of the nine circles. It is for pity of Francesca that he falls like a dead man.

Now the word pity in Italian has a double meaning ; *pietà* (pity, or piety) towards friends or relations means helpful service, prompted by instinctive feelings of duty. Piety is a natural and spontaneous feeling implanted in the human heart and guiding human conduct, in all but the depraved, to acts of mutual aid and consolation. This is, in fact, the pity of Dante,—an instinctive desire to help and succour. It is indeed impossible for human nature constituted as it is at present to look upon suffering without the wish to relieve it. The wish to relieve suffering must start from

the underlying conviction that suffering can be relieved or will sooner or later be ended. The human mind cannot look upon pain and agony as a normal and permanent condition of human existence. The first impulse of one who sees another in distress is one of pity, piety; which, if in no other way, at least by a wish or a prayer, a tear or a word, attempts to heal and relieve. Could we believe in irremediable, unalterable, and unending distress we should be able to look upon it without any emotion except the stolid apathy of despair.

When Dante admitted human pity into his Inferno it seems to me that that cancelled that defiant inscription on its portal which forbade hope to those who entered the eternal gate.

In a drama which is sometimes considered the grandest production of Greek poetry, we see the Titan Prometheus chained by order of Zeus to the mountain crags, and enduring with unbroken will and resolution the tyranny of his tormentor. He cries aloud on nature to witness his sufferings, he calls on the orb of the sun, on the swift winds, on the waves that dimple far below his feet, to behold his pangs.

And nature responds: the ocean nymphs come trooping from shore and cavern and whisper words of pity and consolation into his ear. But the whole meaning and consistency of the striking fable would be sacrificed, the symmetry and proportion of the whole tale would vanish, it would, in fact, be a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing, unless to Prometheus Bound had been duly appended the sequel of Prometheus Released.

Looking at Dante's poem from a literary point of view, we may observe that he calls it a comedy, because it ends not in death and disaster, but in the light of Paradise. It is a drama, though the stage of this drama is Dante's life. In a drama is movement, progress, and evolution. In this Divine Comedy the poet himself is the protagonist, and in the final act finds the drama has brought him to happiness. He himself has described how he found that happiness, even at Ravenna. I believe that it is missing the poet's meaning to take the *Inferno* as if it were a complete poem exhibiting a fixed and unalterable phase in human experience. Dante has made hell but

one act, one passing hour of agony, one crucial moment of concentrated and intolerable conflict; after this hell the poet's mind steals forth once more to the fresh light of day, to the matin-chant of birds, the sun, and stars. Life is renewed after death, and he climbs up the Hill of Purification, and enters the earthly Paradise of peace and refreshment. The fixed, hopeless, irrevocable condition of evil and torment which follows the last judgment is not in the poet's mind. The sequel to the only Inferno he knows, the only Inferno he has revealed to us, is first Purification, and then Paradise. Under any other conception of the poet's meaning, the *Inferno* would be a blot upon the literature of the world, an arraignment of Divine Providence tenfold more reckless and unreasonable than Swinburne's famous, or infamous, chorus in the *Atalanta in Calydon* beginning, "What shall be done with all these tears of ours." As a matter of fact, nothing in the present life of an individual is as yet fixed and unchangeable; the fixed and unchangeable is to come.¹ The very word

¹ *Par.*, iii., 82-84.

nature means that which is about to be. Those celestial bodies which old astronomers called fixed stars are since found to be fulfilling orbits of incalculable cycles; and so in the moral world, and in the underworld which lies so closely beyond the veil of all one sees and knows and feels, everything is still under the unwearyed law of movement, advancement, and indefinitely increasing progress. Dante's Hell is the hell of wicked hearts and wicked lives in this world: from wickedness no hope can arise; evil is, of itself and in its very nature, barren, destructive, and final; no good can grow from it. But if the evil is burnt out, eliminated, and left, as Dante left the Inferno of his own life and heart, if the Hill of Purification be traversed, nothing prevents the individual from advancing to the circles of light and music, the Paradise and Presence of God and His saints.





CHAPTER IV

“ IL PURGATORIO ”

WHEN Dante entered on “ that second kingdom ”

Wherein the human spirit doth purge itself
And to ascend to heaven becometh worthy¹

he enters also realms in which is found that hope which he says was to be abandoned at the gate of his Inferno. Darkness is left behind, the tangled wood of dire perplexity from which he started on his journey is forgotten. He has issued forth to a heaven where the four stars of the Southern Cross appear.

The oriental sapphire’s hue benign,
Suffusing tenderly the face serene
Which the pure ether stretches to the line

¹ *Purg.*, i., 5.

The nearest circle draws, brought rapture keen
To my spent eyes, which had dejected been,
As had my heart, within that deadly air
From which I late had issued. Now, between
The constellated Fishes, glittered fair
The planet that for love does human hearts prepare,

Making the eastern welkin laugh for glee.
Rightward I turned, and fixed my mind upon
The southern pole, and saw upon that sky
Four stars that never yet on man had shone,
Saving in Eden; and their benison
Seemed to fill all the heavens with cheerfulness.¹

His words are full of the calm and placid
satisfaction of one escaped from the tenebrous
pit, where sighs make the eternal air tremble.

Hope has now dawned [says Thomas Carlyle],
never-dying hope, if in company still with heavy
sorrow. The obscure sojourn of demons and re-
probates is under foot, a soft breathing of penitence
mounts higher and higher, to the throne of mercy
itself. They toil painfully up that winding steep,
yet nevertheless in years, in ages, in æons, they
shall have reached the top, which is Heaven's gate,
and by mercy shall have been admitted in. The
joy, too, of all, when one has prevailed; the whole
mountain shakes with joy, and a psalm of praise

¹ *Purg.*, i., 13-25.

rises, when one soul has perfected repentance, and got its sin and misery left behind. I call this a noble embodiment of a true and noble thought.

Such in part is the summary of Dante's *Purgatorio* given us by the eloquent sage of Chelsea. Perhaps it is a little premature to quote it here; for before giving an analysis of this portion of Dante's work it is necessary to remind the reader what that doctrine of Purgatory is which the poet has here embodied. It is scarcely necessary to repeat that Dante's Hill of Purgatory rises with seven circles or ledges from that part of the ocean which is the antipodes of Jerusalem. The lower part of this conical peak, steep as that of Teneriffe, is the anti-purgatory. Purgatory proper is entered by a gate, and, its seven circles being traversed, the earthly Paradise is reached. The earthly Paradise, in opposition to the heavenly Paradise, indicates the partial bliss enjoyed by those who are purged from their sins, and are waiting for the perfect beatitude of heaven. Of course this merely represents in concrete form the doctrine of Purgatory as formulated by the theologians of the Middle

Ages. It was felt by these teachers of the world that punishment beyond the grave must be, in accordance with abstract notions of justice, modified in duration in proportion to the more or less guiltiness of the person on whom it was visited. More important still was the consideration that punishment, to be reasonable, must be corrective and therefore restorative. Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century promulgated a scheme of Purgatory in which he largely drew upon such heathen conceptions as are found in Virgil and others. The realm of Purgatory he placed under the control of the clergy, and especially of the Pope. In this connection it will be remembered that when the great Florentine, Michael Angelo, was painting in the Sistine Chapel his famous fresco of the *Last Judgment* (which, by the bye, may instructively be studied in connection with Dante's masterpiece), Biagio di Casena, a courtier of the Pope, but no connoisseur, volunteered to criticise the picture in the presence of its author. Angelo grimly revenged himself by inserting in the picture the portrait of Biagio. “Where

has he placed you ? " asked Pope Paul III., on hearing the complaint of his aggrieved official. " In Hell," was Biagio's reply. " I am sorry to hear it," said the witty Pope, gravely, " if it had been in Purgatory something might have been done, but in Hell I have no jurisdiction."

When Dante and his guide reach the shore from which rises the Hill of Purgatory they are met by Cato. The poet says:

I saw an old man, without retinue,
Beside me stand, of aspect dignified,
And worthy of such reverence as is due
From son to sire; his long beard floated wide,
Mixed with white hairs, while hung on either side,
From head to bosom, locks of kindred grey;
The four stars shed their lustre sanctified,
And lighted up his visage with their ray,
So that to me he seemed to front the orb of day.¹

This is Cato of Utica, the republican type of old Roman virtue, whose suicide is the climax of Addison's play. Doubtless he is allotted a place in Purgatory as its keeper (with his countenance illumined by the four stars of the

¹ *Purg.*, i., 31-39.

Southern Cross, representing the four cardinal virtues, Justice, Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude), because Virgil, in the eighth book of his *Aeneid*, had described him as ruling over the good in the Tartarean regions. Cato tells Virgil:

Go now and see, that this one gird him round
With a smooth rush, and that he lave his face,
That never soilure on his cheek be found;
For 't were unmeet his eyes should bear one trace
Of tarnish, meeting the angelic grace
Of that first guide, who is of Paradise.
Reeds on this islet grow about its base
Down yonder, where the billows beat they rise,
And in the slippery ooze their number multiplies.

No other plant that doth to leafage grow
And stiffen straight, could live there, since its
head
It would not bend before the billows' blow;
But go—your backward journey must be sped
Another way; yon sun, now rising red,
Will guide you to the mountain's easier slope.¹

After the girding with a rush, whose bending, yielding nature symbolises humility, the first step in penitence, they see a boat ap-

¹ *Purg.*, i., 94-108.

proaching the shore. An angel is at the stern, and the boat is carried along by him, as he stands fanning the air with his eternal pinions.

This "bird divine," as Dante calls him (an expression imitated by Browning in his "Bird of God"), has brought to the Island of Purgatory more than a hundred spirits, among whom is Casella the musician, of whom we know nothing, except that Dante asks him in the following words to sing one of the poet's own Canzone:

If no new ordinance of this place and hour
Take from thee memory or accomplishment
In songs of love, which formerly had power
To bring to all my longings full content,—
My heart dejected and my body spent
By travel, soothe, I pray, once more with song;
Then he began in voice so eloquent,
"Love that within my mind hath argued long,"
That those sweet echoes still within my memory
throng.¹

The singer is quickly silenced by Cato, who bids the laggard spirits run to the mountain, with the result so exquisitely described as follows:

¹ *Purg.*, ii., 106-114.

Even as when, collecting grain or tares,
The doves, together at their pasture met,
Are quiet, and without their wonted pride,
If aught appear of which they are afraid,
Upon a sudden they their food desert,
Because they are assailed by greater care;
So that fresh company did I behold
The song relinquish, and go tow'rd the hill,
As one who goes, and knows not whitherward;
Nor was our own departure less in haste.¹

At the foot of the mountain they come upon
those who

in contumacy die
Of Holy Church.²

Among these they meet one,

Bright-haired was he, of fair and noble mien;
But his left brow, by dint of steel, had cloven
been.³

This is Manfredi, King of Apulia and Sicily,
who had died at the battle of Benevento, 1265,
fighting in the Ghibelline army, which was de-
feated by the Guelphs under Charles of Anjou.
As Manfredi fought against the Guelphs, *i. e.*,
the papal forces, he was an excommunicate,

¹ *Purg.*, ii., 124 *ad fin.*

² *Purg.*, iii., 136.

³ *Purg.*, iii., 107-108.

but repented, he says, on receiving a mortal wound. His body was laid at the head of the bridge of Benevento, and each soldier threw a stone upon it. As this was church land, and therefore holy, the Bishop of Cosenza took him from this grave and buried him by the river Verde in the Campagna. Thus Manfredi says of himself:

Soon as I felt my wretched body riven
By deadly stabs, I straight myself resigned,
Weeping, to Him by whom free grace is given;
My sins' enormity I had in mind,
But wide the arms of mercy for mankind.
And if Cosenza's shepherd, sent in chase
Of me by Clement, had, what God designed,
Read in this providential page, my place
Of rest would still be found, above the river's race,
Under the burden of that ponderous heap,
In Benevento, at the bridge's head.
Now o'er them winds and rain in torrents sweep,
Far from this realm along the Verde's bed,
Whither they bore them, with quenched candles
led.
Their malediction still is powerless
To do such despite, even 'gainst the dead,
As the eternal love cannot redress,
Long as the olive leaf of hope still blooms to bless.¹

¹ *Purg.*, iii., 118-137.

Farther on, in the Ante-Purgatorio, are those who were negligent, and put off their repentance until the last hour. Among them Dante recognises a certain Florentine, Belacqua, whom he loved in life, and who was an excellent maker of musical instruments. Next they reach those who died by violence but were repentant; among these are Buonconte da Monte Feltro and Pia de' Tolomei. These two penitents tell their stories in the well-known passages that have been already quoted. There are many others whom Dante recognises in the same class: The Tuscan, Benincasa of Arezzo, murdered by the terrible Ghino di Tacco, a nobleman turned bandit, and lurking in the mountains near Siena¹; Cione de' Tarlati, drowned in the Arno at the battle of Bibbiena²; Federigo Novello of Casentino, assassinated in a faction fight³; Count Orso, another victim of a broil⁴; Pierre de la Brosse, slain on a false accusation⁵—a long and bloody list, which indicates the terrible ferocity which

¹ *Purg.*, vi., 14.

² *Purg.*, vi., 17.

³ *Purg.*, vi., 15.

⁴ *Purg.*, vi., 19.

⁵ *Purg.*, vi., 22.

raged among those whom Dante calls the wild beasts, dogs, wolves, and foxes of Tuscany.

Here the poet interposes an apostrophe to Italy, in which he proclaims his theory of Church and State. They are to be eventually co-ordinate and independent institutions. The whole concludes with a sarcastic eulogy of Florence. Then is reached the Valley of the Princes. In a flowery hollow are sealed the princes of various kingdoms, who through bitterness or carelessness neglected the cares of empire, and thus permitted the Church to have undue secular power,—an abuse on which Dante dwells all the more strongly as it was through Pope Boniface that he became an exile.

The sun goes down; with the night come to the penitent memories of the old life of sin, with consequent temptations. They while away the dangerous hours with hymns and psalms. Two angels descend to guard them, and these put to flight the serpent that approached Eve in Eden and now steals in to beguile them:

I saw that noble army congregated,
Pallid and meek, and with uplifted eye,

As if for some celestial boon they waited;
And I saw issuing from the upper sky
Two angels, bearing unsheathed falchions, fly;
But broken the blades, with points no longer keen.
Green as the leaflets, when the spring is by,
Their soft and backward trailing robes were seen,
Beaten and tossed in air by wings of living green.¹

• • • •
And in the little valley, where it lies
Unfended, forth I saw a serpent shoot,
Such as perhaps on Eve bestowed the bitter fruit.

’Mid grass and flowers the writhing monster sped,
And like a creature that its fur would sleek,
Ever toward its back it turned its head.
I did not see, and therefore cannot speak
Of the swift swoop, those guardians made to
wreak
Their vengeance, but I marked that they were
nigh;
And seeing them on emerald pinion seek
The vale, the snake avaunted suddenly;
And they with even wings regained their post on
high.²

That night Dante, while he dreams of being
borne aloft by an eagle, is carried by Lucia
(who represents the enlightening grace of

¹ *Par.*, viii., 22–30.

² *Purg.*, viii., 97–108.

Heaven) to a portal which had three stairs beneath, " Diverse in colour to go up to it." ¹

The first stair

Was marble white, so polished and so smooth,
Mirrored myself therein as I appear.²

This is Confession, the first step toward purgation.

The second step, symbol of Contrition,

stained of deeper hue than perse,
Was of a calcined and uneven stone,
Cracked all asunder lengthwise and across.³

The third, representing Satisfaction,

Porphyry seemed, as flaming red
As blood that from a vein is spurting forth.⁴

" The angel of God " who keeps the gate, " standing upon the threshold," which " seemed a stone of diamond," on being asked by Dante for admittance, " Seven P's upon his forehead, marked with his sword point " (the seven *peccata*, or deadly sins of scholastic theology), telling him to wash the wounds when he shall

¹ *Purg.*, ix., 77.

³ *Purg.*, ix., 97.

² *Purg.*, ix., 95.

⁴ *Purg.*, ix., 100.

be within. The angel then pushes back the portals of the sacred door; the swivels of the consecrated gate revolve; a thunder-peal sounds—and the strains of the *Te Deum* are heard in voices mingled with sweet melody, yet drowned at intervals by the clang of the opening and closing gate;—such melodious strains

As 'mid the organ's trumpeting
We sometimes hear and sometimes do not hear
The voice of those who raise their carols, standing
near.¹

Once within Purgatory, the ascent of the seven circles, seats of the seven deadly sins, begins.

There is nothing more profound, to my mind, than the imagery under which Dante has represented the characteristics of pride, which is the sin of those on the first circle, or terrace, of the Hill of Purgatory. The proud man is one who considers himself the centre of the universe, or, at least, that he has the weight of the world upon his shoulders. The proud in Purgatory he thus apostrophises:

¹ *Purg.*, ix., 143 *ad fin.*

Proud Christians, wretched, by your toils o'erspent,
 Who in the light of feeble minds rely
 On downward paths, that lead to detriment;
 Your life, poor worms, ye never knew to be
 Nought but the cradle of a butterfly
 Angelic, which need fear no judgment day;
 Why should your mien, poor insects, be so high ?
 Insects, whose life, a rudiment of clay,
 But promises the bloom some morrow shall display.

So saw I then, as is a figure seen,
 Carved in a corbel, to sustain a floor
 Or roof, with knee that touches drooping chin,
 And though unreal, never on that score
 Less pitiful; and when I did explore
 Their plight, I saw them more or less down bent,
 According to the burden that they bore,
 And he who took his load with most content
 Said, "I can do no more," in tones of wild lament.¹

Pride was Dante's own sin, and yet how keenly he satirises it. Among the denizens of this terrace he meets Omberto, Count of Santiore of Siena,² and the Roman Oderisi, the painter proud of his skill in illuminating manuscripts. He says:

Here of such pride is paid the forfeiture!
 O thou vainglory of the human powers
 How little green upon thy summit lingers!³

¹ *Purg.*, x., 121.

² *Purg.*, xi., 58.

³ *Purg.*, xi., 79.

Here also is Provenzan Salvani, a Sienese nobleman who fell at Montaperti.¹ As the proud crouch down they see upon the pavement representations of the proud people of all times who have met the vengeance of heaven. The poets now ascend to the second circle and hear voices sing “Blessed are the poor in spirit” “in such wise that speech could not describe it.”² “Ah me!” exclaims Dante, “how different are these entrances from the Inferno, for with anthems here one enters, and below with wild laments.”³ At last he says:

To the stair’s summit we at length were brought;
 Where for the second time is chamfered clear
 The mount by which is sin’s purgation wrought.
 So that a cornice-platform did appear
 Around the hill, resembling the first tier;
 Saving that this in narrower circuit ran.⁴

This is the second circle, where linger the Envious, who, conscious of their blindness, lean upon each other, instead of standing aloof with rancorous jealousy.

All, as it seemed to me, sad sackcloth wore;
 And each upon the other’s shoulders leant,

¹ *Purg.*, xi., 121.

³ *Purg.*, xii., 112.

² *Purg.*, xii., 110.

⁴ *Purg.*, xiii., 1-6.

And all upon the bank behind them bore.
 Just so the blind, forlorn, and indigent,
 On days when Pardoners gather, to frequent
 The porches, asking alms of all, are seen.
 Their head one on the other, with the intent
 Of rousing pity in the crowd, they lean;
 Pity, both for their words, and their dejected mien.

And as upon their orbs no light doth fall;
 So, to the shades whose plight I would reveal,
 Heaven's sun its bounty grudges; for they all
 Have, through their eyelids run, a thread of steel,
 Whose suture keeps them closed; as falconers
 deal
 With falcons wild that will not heed their call.¹

Among these is Sapia of Siena, a lady who gazed from a window on a battle between her countrymen (whom she hated because she was in banishment) and the Florentines, and saw with joy the Sienese routed by their foes.

"Siena was my dwelling-place, and here
 With these, the purge of sins I undergo,
 And turn to Him, with many a bitter tear,
 Who ever will His help on us bestow;
 I was not wise, although they named me so²;
 And I was wont less pleasure to receive
 From my good fortune than my neighbour's woe.

¹ *Purg.*, xiii., 58-72. ² *Sapia* may mean "the wise lady."

And, that you may not think my words deceive,
Listen and in my mood of foolishness believe.

“ As close to Colle’s walls the Sienese
(Just as I turned on my years’ first descent)
Were fighting, I prayed God their enemies
Might win the victory, as was His intent;
Utterly routed was their armament;
And as I watched them, my bold face I turned
To heaven, and cried,—so vast was my con-
tent,—

“No more I fear thee.”—So the blackbird spurned¹
Its God, when one brief glance of summer time re-
turned.²

“ Dying, I wished my peace with God to find,
Nor yet by penitence the score had paid,
But that Pier Pettignano in his mind
Had kept me, while with holy zeal he prayed,
And sorrowing lent his charitable aid.”³

They rise to the third circle with the anthem
“Blessed are the merciful” resounding behind
them.⁴ Here they find those who have sinned
by anger. These are wrapped in a dense
smoke, painful to the eyes.

¹ The warm days at the end of January are called in Italy “i giorni della merla,” “blackbird summer,” from the legend alluded to by Sapia.

³ *Purg.*, xiii., 106.

² *Pur.*, xiii., 106–123.

⁴ *Purg.*, xv., 38.

The murk of Hell, or of a night unlit
By any planet, 'neath a dreary sky,
And darkened deep as clouds can darken it,
Ne'er on my sight in such thick folds did lie,
Nor felt to sense so rough a tapestry,
As did the cloud that wrapped us like a pall;
It took the power of opening from the eye;
Wherefore my guide so true, so wise withal,
Turned, that upon his shoulder propped I might
not fall.

As turns the blind to him who leads the way,
Lest he should miss his course, or should run
foul
Of what would injure him, or even slay;—
So thro' that poisonous vapour's bitter scowl,
I glided to my escort's kind control,
Who said, "Take heed you do not leave my side."
I heard the voice of many and many a soul,
In prayer for peace and pity, echoing wide;
The Lamb of God Who bore our sins, to Him
they cried.

Thus *Agnus Dei* the exordium made
To all their prayers, and one was all their
cry;
There was one cadence in the words they said,
So that the clamour rose in harmony;
"Master," I asked, "is this loud company
A company of spirits that I hear?"
"Thou hast divined aright," he made reply;

“ For these are they who struggle to get clear
From Anger’s knotted net, that keeps them prisoned
here.”¹

In the fourth circle are the Slothful, who erred by remissness in doing the actions dictated by love. In the fifth circle are the Avaricious and Prodigal. These people Dante saw bound hand and foot, prone upon the ground, all downward turned. “ My soul cleaveth unto the dust,” he heard them say, “ with sighing so profound that hardly could the words be understood.”² There Pope Adrian V. confesses: “ Tardy, ah, woe is me, was my conversion—until that time a wretched soul and parted from God was I, and wholly avaricious. Now as thou seest I here am punished for it.”³

Here is the effect of Avarice made plain,
In the purgation of souls made penitent;
No bitterer torture does the mount contain.
For as our eye was never upward bent,
But downward cast, on earthly things intent,
So Justice sinks us grovelling to the ground.
By avarice love of God grew impotent,

¹ *Purg.*, xvi., 1-24.

² *Purg.*, xix., 73.

³ *Purg.*, xix., 112.

So that for doing good no place was found,
Whence crippled hand and foot here Justice keeps
us bound.¹

It is in the fifth circle that the two poets felt an earthquake shake the mountain, and the cry of "*Gloria in Excelsis*" was raised. The pilgrims paused immovable and in suspense (even as the shepherds who first heard that song at the Nativity) until the trembling ceased, and it was finished. This is the token that some soul has been purified.

The earthquake shakes this mountain on the morn
When any soul knows its purgation ended,
So that it rises, and is upward borne
Toward Paradise, with such a song attended.²

The spirit was that of Statius, the Latin poet, who gives an account of himself, and adds that he would gladly have spent another year in Purgatory to have been a contemporary of Virgil, of whom he was an imitator. It is because of his admiration for this poet that Dante exalts him to the Hill of Purgatory. Addressing Virgil, Statius adds an account of

¹ *Purg.*, xix., 115-126.

² *Purg.*, xxi., 58-60.

his conversion, which he attributes partly to Virgil's writings, partly to the testimony of Christian martyrs.

“Thou settedst me on the way
Toward Parnassus' spring and caverned height;
And, after God, first gavest me wisdom's ray;
Thou wert as one who, travelling thro' the night,
Bears at his back a lamp, which sheds its light
On those behind, while he in darkness wends;
For didst thou not that mystic song indite,—
‘The age grows young, the ancient lineage ends
In primal bloom; from heaven a newer race de-
scends’? ”¹

Virgil builded verses better than he knew, not being a Christian, if what Statius says may be taken as testimony:

“And as through thee I learned the poet's skill,
So I turned Christian, through that song of thine.
But let me with more lively colours fill
This picture, to make plainer the design.
The world already had become the shrine
Of that true faith, in every quarter spread
By the bold heralds of the realm divine;
And thy sweet strain was one with what they said,
Whence with new purpose them I oftentimes visited.

¹ *Purg.*, xxii., 64-72.

" At last, so great appeared their sanctity,
That when Domitian slew them for their creed,
Their lamentations drew forth tears from me;
And long as I was with them, in their need
I succoured them; for every word and deed
Of these were such as led me to despise
All other sects; and e'er 't was mine to lead
The Greeks, in my poetic fantasies,
To where the towers of Thebes amid its rivers rise,

" They gave me baptism, but I hid, through fear,
My Christian vow and name, and still professed
To be a pagan; for four centuries here
Has this lukewarmness kept me, without rest,
Round the fourth circle moving."¹

In the sixth circle is met among the Gluttons Forese Donati, his wife's brother and a poet also. Forese stands before the mystic tree laden with apples which he cannot reach, while a stream from above falls and dances among its boughs, but refuses to slake the thirst of the gluttonous.

Hollow and dark the eyes of each one shone;
Their cheeks were pallid, and so stripped and
lean,
The pelt took form as of a skeleton;
Not even Erysichthon's self, I ween,

¹ *Purg.*, xxii., 73-93.

Was e'er so shrunken to the outmost skin,
By famine, when its direst pang he knew.

Then to myself I said: This must have been
The race whose burg the Romans overthrew,
Jerusalem; her child for food when Mary slew.

Their sockets were like rings without a gem

Who in those faces O. M. O. could see,
Were at no pains to recognise the M.

Who would believe an apple's fragrancy
Or scent of water had such potency
By the desire it roused, to wither them.¹

It was not an uncommon fancy in the Middle Ages that even on the human countenance was written the signature of man's nature. The two eyes represented two O's; the nose formed the middle angle of M ; the cheek-bones the side-strokes of the same letter, making up the word *OMO*, *i. e.*, *homo*, man. The leanness of these suffering shades was such that the nose and cheek-bones were especially prominent, so that those who thus read the human face could easily recognise the M.

Forese says that the pain of hunger is still a solace:

¹ *Purg.*, xxiii., 22-36.

" Tho' the scent issuing from the apple's rind
 Or from the leafy verdure, drenched with spray,
 Hunger and thirst excite in us; we find
 That as along this circling path we stray
 Our bitter pain does often pass away;
 I call it bitter pain—'t is solace kind;
 For the same will that leads us to survey
 This tree, was also in the Saviour's mind,
 When with loud Voice He cried, and life for us
 resigned."¹

Dante asks him how he escaped the Inferno, where he expected to find himself.

Then answered he : " That now I wander, reaping
 The bittersweet of all this punishment,
 My Nella gained for me, her vigil keeping
 In prayer devout and infinite lament.
 Thus, here, beyond that shore of waiting sent,
 I landed, from the lower circles freed.
 And that more dear to God omnipotent
 Lives on my little widow, is the meed
 Of the lone life she spends in many a saintly
 deed."²

Then Forese turns to a condemnation of the unblushing womenkind in general of Florence. The disappointed eagerness of the shades trying to reach the fruit is illustrated by a simile

¹ *Purg.*, xxiii., 67-75.

² *Purg.*, xxiii., 85.

which shows at once the directness and naïveté of Dante's style:

Lo! there appeared to me, with branches bent
By living fruit, another apple-tree,
Near by, tho' now first seen on our descent.
Beneath its boughs I saw a company
Towards the leaves raise high their hands, and cry
I know not what; like children who desire,
Eager and baffled still, some trumpery,
Of one who answers not, but dangles higher
In sight the thing they crave, to whet their keen
desire.¹

The whole passage is a good example of Dante at his best. The sweetness, seriousness, and abounding beauty of his skill plays with a fresh and tender light over a subject that might so easily have been made merely disgusting.

In the seventh circle is the fire which purges those soiled by sensuality. Through this fire Dante has to pass before he can reach the Earthly Paradise, and proceed farther to the celestial Paradise itself.

He is told:

“No farther, sainted souls,
Lies the way open, till the fire be crossed;

¹ *Purg.*, xxiv., 103-111.

Then enter it, and hear the song that rolls
Within it." Thus the Angel did accost
Our company, but like a body tōst
Into the grave, became I deadly pale;
I held my hands before me clasped and closed,
And peered into the fire, ready to quail
At sight of limbs afame, within the fiery vale.

Then my kind escorts turned to me again;
And Virgil spoke: " My son, away with fear !
There thou may'st tortured be, but never slain;
Recall, recall how thro' that journey drear
With Geryon I had skill to safely steer.
Shall I do less, so close to Paradise ?
Believe, that shouldst thou reach thy thousandth
year
Within this cave, no flames that fiercest rise
Could force thee from thy head one hair to sacrifice.

" And, if thou thinkest that I would betray thee,
Test thou the flame, and do not stand aloof;
But hold in it thy garment's hem, I pray thee,
And when thou seest no hurt to web or woof,
Casting thy terror from thee at the proof,
Turn hither, entering in with heart serene."
Then seeing me unstirred by his reproof,
" 'Twixt thee and Beatrice," with changed mien
He cried, " this wall of fire alone doth intervene."

As dying Pyramus unclosed his eyes
At Thisbe's name, and fixed on her his gaze,

When flamed the mulberry tree with crimson dyes,
So to my chief I turned, as if to seize
The echo of that name, whose ceaseless praise
Wells from my heart; whence cried he, half in jest,
“ And is there reason now for more delays ? ”
And smiled, as if an infant he addressed,
By proffered apple won to follow his behest.

Then before me he passed into the fire.¹

On emerging from the purifying fire and entering the Earthly Paradise, Dante is met by Matilda, a lady eminent as a Guelph in the struggle of Tuscany against the emperors. She thus speaks to him of the place where he finds himself, and of the two rivers, Lethe and Eunöe, which flow through it :

“ And you must know this wide and holy field,
On which you stand, produces every tree,
And yields such fruit as earth can never yield;
Not from such water doth this stream you see
Have birth, as vapour cold-condensed sets free,
Like rivers that alternate gain and lose
Their volume; but from fountain treasury
Unchanging and exhaustless it arose,
God’s will restoring all, that from each opening
flows.

“ From this side falls a flood that has the power
Of all past sins the memory to erase;

¹ *Purg.*, xxvii., 10-46.

From that side one descends that can restore
 Remembrance of good deeds and pious days;
 [Yet neither of them yields its special grace,
 Unless they both be tasted,] wherefore one
 Is Lethe, one Eunoe called; our race
 Knows of no savour, under earthly sun,
 Sweeter than from these streams by pilgrim lips is
 won.

“ And tho’ thy thirst for knowledge now be slaked,
 (So that I need no more to thee impart,)
 One inference, I will add, unsued, unchecked,
 And on themes unpremeditated start;
 Take thou this corollary then to heart:
 The ancients who described an age of gold,
 Painting its bliss with sweet poetic art,
 Dreamed haply that the race of which they told
 Upon Parnassus dwelt; but here it was of old,

“ Here, that in innocence the human root
 First sprang, even on this hill, where ever reigned
 Perpetual Spring, and flourished every fruit,—
 Nectar, and all that poet ever feigned.”¹

In this Terrestrial Paradise, image of society
 transformed by religion, Dante is spectator of
 a wonderful procession emblematical of the
 Church purified from the world.² It is here
 that he parts from Virgil, to whom in his long

¹ *Purg.*, xxviii., 118-144.

² *Purg.*, xix.

journey and all its perplexities he had been wont to turn with that reliance with which the little child runs to his mother when he has fears or when he is afflicted. He is now reunited with Beatrice, whose power had pierced him through, "ere from his boyhood he had yet come forth." He describes her appearance as follows:

Ere this I have beheld at early morn
The eastern heavens aglow with rosy hue,
While blue serene does all the west adorn,
And veiled with mists, the sun has risen to
view,—
So that thro' vapours, that its force subdue,
The eye can long its dazzling light sustain.
'T was thus I saw a radiant lady thro'
A cloud of blooms, that Angels showered amain,
So that, within, without, her car the petals rain.

With snowy veil, and cincture olive-dyed,
Coming she shone, beneath her mantle green
In robe of flame-like lustre glorified.
And tho' I reckoned long the time had been
Since I my lady face to face had seen,
Abashed and awestruck, and although I knew
Now veiled from vision was her face serene,—
Yet o'er me such a spell her presence threw,
That all the ancient love, I felt its power renew.

And when my sight had known the lofty power,
 Which once I felt my bosom penetrate
 Ere I had passed my boyhood's idle hour,
 I turned me leftward, as precipitate
 As children, when they hurry, in the strait
 Of fear or sorrow, to a mother's arm;
 And said to Virgil, " Not a drachma's weight
 Of blood beats in me but with strange alarm
 Trembles ; the ancient love asserts its earlier
 charm."¹

But, the poet adds, " Virgilius, depriving us
 of his company, had left us," —

Virgilius, sweetest of all fathers,
 Virgilius, to whom I for safety gave me.

Beatrice upbraids Dante, and relates how
 she has laboured for his salvation. He weeps.
 The angels, who have been singing, ask, " O
 Lady, wherefore dost thou thus upbraid him ? "
 She replies :

This was a man, who in his earlier day
 Might, by the innate virtue of his mind,
 Have let all noble habits have full play;
 But the more strength and sap in soils we find,
 The more are savageness and famine joined
 In what they bear, when seed and culture fail.

¹ *Purg.*, xxx., 22-48.

My countenance to him was long inclined
For his support, and oftentimes did avail
My girlish eyes to lead his steps on victory's trail.

When on the threshold of life's higher range
I stood, for mine, another's face he sought; *l p r i l e s a y*
When I from flesh did into spirit change,
And grace and beauty in me brighter wrought,
To him in love and pleasing I was nought.
And thro' misleading ways his steps he turned;
At baseless phantoms of the good he caught;
Nor from his visions, day or night, discerned
'T was I that called him back, and for his safety
yearned.

So low he sank, that every means fell short
For his salvation; it alone remained
That face to face with Hell the man be brought;
Then at the portal of the dead I gained
My prayers an access to the guide ordained
To lead him safely thro' the infernal waste.
If, Lethe crossed, the oblivious draught he
drained,
With no repentant suffering for the past,
The high decree of God were broken and defaced.¹

Dante exhibits penitence and is plunged into
the river Lethe, or forgetfulness. Hence-
forth he becomes utterly oblivious of those

¹ *Purg.*, xxx., 115 *ad fin.*

/ faults and defects the consciousness of which is the essence of the purgatorial ordeal. Dante restored to Beatrice,—whose holy smile “drew his eyes unto itself with the old net,”—and that is the end of the *Purgatorio*. There was no release or relief to the Inferno—excepting the stars which awaited those who issued from its dismal archway. The point of happiness to which the purged soul aspires in the Earthly Paradise is Beatrice, as that to which the beatified soul aims in the Celestial Paradise is the presence of God Himself.

The *Purgatorio* of Dante is perhaps the most impressive portion of his poem. The *Inferno* is full of horror, and revolts us by its details of human suffering. The air is dense with curses, sighs, and shrieks. Every form is hideous; ancient mythology has been ransacked for ghastly and bestial shapes and types of wickedness and cruelty. Malignity, lust, and murder blacken with their clouds the whole atmosphere, which is unpierced by the rays of the sun. The spirit of the *Inferno* is pagan, because it is without light and without hope. Here are death and torment as Virgil describes them.

God is not a father, and there is no Christ in the *Inferno*.

Yet if we would read the *Inferno* aright we must not think that Dante is merely carrying out in it a certain scholastic conception of the punishment of sin. It is of very little consequence what we glibly say or think about the duration of punishment to wrongdoers. It is of the greatest possible importance that we should recognise the principle that there is and will be a certain retribution for wrongdoers, and that so long as wrong endures, the shadow of wrong will be vengeance. So long as the human will stands in defiance of the law of God and society, it exposes him who exercises it to punishment caused by its error. This was the truth Dante asserted, this was the scourge he shook over the cities of Tuscany.

When we come to his *Purgatorio* we see everything changed. The poet has reached the other side of the problem. You will notice in the *Inferno* it is always night. In the *Purgatorio* you might almost say it is always either morning or evening. There are a great many descriptions in the *Purgatorio* of natural objects

and phenomena, but the morning and the evening are depicted over and over again. There is the morning, when the sun, shedding its rays, "already the whole west changed from its azure aspect into white." There is the evening, when pilgrims think of the friends they have left behind. Dante seems to have made the heavens of his *Purgatorio* to be suffused with a light which is just a few degrees clearer than twilight. It is the fresh, dewy, balmy promise of the day, or it is the quiet and solemn season which ushers in the night. Doubtless this is a stroke of art on the part of the poet, who always keeps us trembling in the suspense of a fleeting phase of sunlight, as distinct from the calm, steady blaze of noon. In fact, in poetry the morning and the evening are the most emotional seasons of the day; the dreams, as Dante says, which are to come true, terrify or cheer us at dawn; the evening is the time of memory, when the heart feeds deep thought with many a dream of the past: for, as our poet says, "all men love to look back." And of course, as in the *Inferno*, so in the *Purgatorio* it would be quite absurd to think that Dante

is merely embodying in poetry the scheme of Purgatorial dogma promulgated by Gregory the Great. The scheme came ready-made to hand, but Dante has filled it with breath and movement. He has made it the vehicle of recounting his own life's experience. To every noble and honest nature the whole of life is taken up with an attempt to cast away the dross and refine the gold of personal existence. In this process all that is painful, mutable, sweet, and bitter in life may work in harmony, like the angelic songs, the thunder, the famine and thirst and breath of fire which under the green boughs and amid the alternate opening and closing of doors of Dante's *Purgatorio* result at last in Lethe,—forgetfulness of the past and perfect purification.

In short, the *Purgatorio* is the point at which the poet comes closest to the spirit of modern literature and modern aspiration. The spontaneous joy which pervades Hellenic literature stands always overshadowed by the black cloud of Death and Fate. From the very fountain of life's delight, says a Latin poet, there rises something of bitterness to torture us even amid

the roses of the feast. With the Greek, life must either be night or noon. The characteristic tone of the modern world is twilight. Modern literature may have the air of disappointed aspiration, but this is often accompanied with hope. The mingling of beauty with melancholy, the discovery of a charm in pain, the acknowledgment of the luxury of woe (however exaggerated is the *welt-schmerz*, the world-pain of Goethe and Byron), are real things, and find their purest, sweetest, and most exalted example in this wonderful book of Dante.

The ecclesiastical doctrine of Purgatory is said to have become obsolete in the Protestant world. But it has become revived in the domain of pure literature. It is the underlying motif in many of George Eliot's novels—and appears in such a shape that the personages in a drama expiate their faults, and amend them, by willingly and patiently undergoing the punishment which they have provoked. This doctrine appears in literature because it appears in life, and it is recognised in life because human will and human responsibility are recog-

nised. The man who sins is no longer like Oedipus considered to be involved by fate in an inextricable mesh of circumstance, or, like Ajax, induced by spells to do what his soul abhors, but is a free agent, choosing his line of action, and therefore feeling himself bound to work out his own salvation and release, by enduring those consequences of wrongdoing which are intended in the course of life to purify the sinner and to put away his sin.





CHAPTER V

" THE PARADISO "

THE Inferno of Dante is a subterranean realm, murky, dismal, and dolorous, from which hope is excluded. In passing through it, the poet descends, ledge by ledge, until he reaches the lowest pit of the Giudecca. The horror increases step by step, until he touches that last division of the nine circles.

The Hill of Purgatory stands upon the surface of the earth. The journey through it is an ascent which ends in the earthly Paradise. Here the poet is reunited with her " whose power had pierced him through, ere from his boyhood he had yet come forth." This is Beatrice, whose image seems to have hovered over him like an attendant genius throughout his whole spiritual and intellectual life. In-

deed, so far as the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* of Dante are actually autobiographical, the presence of Beatrice in the poem reminds us of that monitor which was ever whispering into the ear of the sage to whom Dante has given a place of honour in his limbo.

The Master I beheld of those who know,

There I beheld both Socrates and Plato,
Who nearer him before the others stand.¹

The dæmon or genius of Socrates was perhaps merely a personification of conscience. He calls it a divine voice, or sign, and to its occasional manifestations he always yields. At one critical point in his career, when he was being tried for his life, he abandoned his purpose of setting up a defence, because the divine thing spoke to him and forbade him to do so.

But Beatrice was a great deal more than this to Dante. Beatrice was a woman who in childhood had roused in the soul of Dante an ideal passion, in which were combined natural

¹ *Inf.*, iv., 131.

affection and religious enthusiasm. This may be a rare phase of sentiment, but it is by no means an impossible one. It came to him in the time of his innocence, when his heart was warm with religious earnestness. He had not reached that period of which he speaks so sadly in the *Paradiso*: "Faith and innocence are found only in children; they both fly away ere yet the cheeks are covered with down." The *Vita Nuova*, in which Dante records this pure love so interwoven with religious devotion, describes our poet as seeing God in His works, and recognising everywhere the riches of His grace. In some way Beatrice illuminated for him the world, and pointed out the secrets of its constitution. She was to Dante "the destroyer of all vices, and the queen of virtue," in whose presence the spirit of love, vanquishing in the poet all other feelings, "supplants the spirit of sight by the spirit of Faith."

In the *Vita Nuova* we read that this most gentle lady died, and, whether simultaneously or not, a change took place in Dante's intellectual attitude. That doubt which, as he

says, “springs up at the foot of the tree of truth,”¹ not only grew up but overshadowed the better tree. Beatrice had been to Dante in boyhood a sort of religious inspiration. His love for her had supported his religious faith. Beatrice had become to his mind as he looked back upon the fair, clear, and innocent past, a symbol of religious illumination. In his poem he synchronises his loss of faith and his loss of Beatrice.

It is then that he comes under the spell of a new love. “Another,” he says, “looked at me with a face so pious and pallid as if it were of love, that she oftentimes reminded me of my most gentle lady.” This second lady is nothing but Speculative Philosophy, his devotion to which is manifested in his book, *Il Convito (The Banquet)*. His childlike and trusting faith of the past is gone, Beatrice has vanished, and the poet, restless and unsatisfied, is ever asking new questions, and trying to solve by human intellect things that reason cannot interpret—as he is afterwards bound to confess:

¹ *Par.*, iv., 131.

" Foolish is he who hopes that our reason can traverse the infinite way which one substance in three persons keeps."

In the *Convito* he himself says plainly what he means by this second love. " The lady of whom I became enamoured after my first love was Philosophy "; of whom Beatrice says in the *Paradiso*:

" Ye cannot keep to the path of truth on earth by means of Philosophy, so much does the love of the apparent, and your own thought mislead you."

In the *Paradiso* he describes his journey through space across the nine circles of Heaven up to that Empyrean of which in his *Convito* (or *Banquet*) he writes:

" The Empyrean Heaven by its peace signifies the Divine Science of Theology, which is full of peace and unperturbed by strife of opinion or of sophistical arguments, by reason of the pre-eminent certitude of its subject, God Himself."

It is in Beatrice, who returns to him, or rather to whom he returns, that Dante finds the guide whom he is to follow from the sum-

mit of Purgatory to the place of the Beatific Vision. In her company he passes through the Circles of the Moon, of Mercury, Venus, the Sun, of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Fixed Stars, and of the Crystalline Heavens, or *Primum Mobile*. His journey ends in the Em-pyrenean, where is the visible Presence of God. At the centre of these spheres, according to the astronomical system known as the Ptolemaic, lies the earth.

But Dante in passing through these various rings or wheels of light, impresses upon us over and over again that they are to him merely so many manifestations of the power and character of the Supreme Being. This ordered system is the wax to which the Divine mind is the seal:

The highest sphere of all, the peace divine,
Does from itself such force of life expand,
That all within its circle crystalline
Their being draw from it; and so the band
Of stars, that in the second circle stand,
The various qualities that they contain
To divers orders of existence lend;
All other rings, that different powers maintain,
Allot them, as their ends or origins ordain.

The organs of the world so ordered go,
 That all that reaches them from realms on high,
 This they distribute to the realms below;
 Regard me well, and note the paths that lie
 Towards that knowledge true, for which you sigh;
 That you may safely seek the track alone.
 The blessed Motors, it is plain, supply
 The power and life the holy circle own,
 As in the hammer's stroke, the workman's strength
 is shown.

The heavens, which many a glittering star adorn,
 But take their image from that unplumbed Mind
 Which moves them; of this image there is born
 The Seal that operates, like the soul confined
 In body of clay, which shapes this common rind,
 Through different organs spread, with varied share
 Of function to its potency assigned.
 So goodness, multiplied from star to star,
 Self-centred Wisdom pours, and stamps its image
 there.¹

These Motors are celestial Intelligences
 controlling each of the nine circles: namely,
 Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions,
 Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels,
 Angels.

To Dante's imagination these nine spheres

¹ *Par.*, ii., 112-138.

or orbits were regions unearthly and unlike to earth; they represented the glory of God in their several degrees, and in his poem are far more than astronomic denominations. They are pulsating with the Divine Life, they are typical of the Divine beauty, they are the seats of Divine favour and peace.

Dante and Beatrice on leaving the earthly Paradise first shoot upwards towards the sphere of Fire. Dante confesses that he has but a vague memory of all he saw and heard in this whole mystic journey. So intense is the innate desire of the soul to attain the vision of God, that as it draws near fulfilment “our understanding enters so deep that the memory cannot follow.”¹

Beatrice turns her eyes to the sun; “never did eagle so fix himself upon it.”² Dante gazes into her eyes, in which the sun was reflected, and saw it sparkling round about, “like iron that issues boiling from the fire.”³ In a blaze of light, that rain or river never made so broad a lake, swift as lightning they reach the sphere of Fire. He knows not

¹ *Par.*, i., 7.

² *Par.*, i., 46.

³ *Par.*, i., 60.

whether he is trans-humanised and changed to mere soul or not. His swift ascent, his guide tells him, results from the human passion to reach the Presence of God. It is quite natural.

" No greater marvel is there, as I deem,
 In this thy heavenward flight, than in the flow
 Of mountain torrents to the vale below.
 Strange would it be, if thy deliverance
 From mortal burden left thee slack and slow
 As in dull earth, 'mid this divine expanse.''
 Then once again she turned to Heaven her countenance.¹

But the concrete and perpetual thirst for the " deiform realm "² still bore them swiftly on. " Uplift thy grateful mind to God," said Beatrice, " for He has brought us to the first star,"—*i. e.*, the Moon.³

But it is best to quote the whole passage:

Turning to me, as glad as she was fair,
 " Direct thy grateful mind to God," she said,
 " Who now has brought us to the nearest star."
 It seemed as if a cloud had o'er us spread,
 Bright, dense, unriven, and such a light it shed,
 As might a diamond stricken by the sun;

¹ *Par.*, i., 135-142.

² Deiforme regno.—*Par.*, ii., 20.

³ *Par.*, ii., 29.

Into the eternal pearl we enteréd
As into water rays of sunlight run
Till lymph and sunbeam blent, appear as they were
one.

If I was body who thus entered in
(Since earthly science cannot in one space
Conceive two solids standing), far more keen
Should be our wish that Essence face to face
To see in which, by seeing, we can trace
The way God's nature does with man's combine;
To see what now, believing we embrace,
Through faith, which without reason can divine,
By intuition, things beyond our visual line.¹

Here is the poet's theory of knowledge of unseen things. Knowledge in this domain is with Dante not a synthesis; it is an intuition. “That first truth that man receives” is the body of truths which people call self-evident, such as the existence of space, the difference between the subject and the object in thought, and the fact that the whole is greater than the part. Among such self-evident facts he would class the existence of God and the immortality of man. For, as he says, on such topics as these

Reason following the senses has short wings.²

¹ *Par.*, ii., 31.

² *Par.*, ii., 56.

In explaining to Dante the cause of spots upon the Moon, Beatrice says that they result from the varied manifestations in matter of that virtue which proceeds, in the form of light, from the Divine Intelligence; an allegory, undoubtedly, illustrating the principle that there are diversities of gifts, but it is the same spirit. In the Heaven of the Moon the poet is surrounded by a crowd of dim faces, such as form the background to the Sistine *Madonna* of Raphael. Many countenances, eager to speak, appear like the reflections on transparent glass through which is half seen what lies beyond, or on clear and tranquil waters, whose bed, dark below, blends with the unmoved features, and scarcely permits to be discerned a white brow, on which a pearl is set.¹

The poet mistakes them for mirrored semblances; "the sweet guide smiles and, glowing in her holy eyes," assures him that these are true substances, but placed here through failure in their vows.

It is now he meets with Piccarda Donati,

¹ *Par.*, iii., 7.

sister of his own wife, Gemma. It is a matter of history that Piccarda was compelled by her brother to renounce her vows as a nun of St. Clare and to marry.

To follow her, I left the worldly crowd,
In girlhood, for her habit's safe retreat;
And to her order's rule my life I vowed;
Then I was ravished from that cloister sweet
By men less versed in goodness than deceit:
And God knows what my life has been since then.¹

Dante, the proud and ambitious, asks her, “Tell me, ye who are happy here in the lowest sphere, do ye desire a higher place, in order to see more, or to make yourselves more friends?” “With those other shades she first smiled a little,” the poet explains to us, “then answered me so glad, that she seemed to burn in the first fire of love: ‘Brother, virtue of charity quiets our will, and makes us wish only for that which we have, and for aught else makes no thirst. Should we desire to be higher up, our desires would be discordant with the will of Him who assigns us to this place, which thou wilt see is not possible in

¹ *Par.*, iii., 103-108.

these circles, if to be in charity is here natural, and if its nature thou dost well consider. Nay, it is essential to this blessed existence to hold ourselves within the divine will, whereby our very wills are made one. So that as we are, ranged in different ranks throughout this realm, to all the realm is pleasing, as to the King who inwills us with His will.¹ And His will is our peace. It is that sea whereunto is moving all that which it creates and which nature makes.''²

Here also is Constance, who was taken from a convent to marry the son and successor of Frederick Barbarossa. " Yet from the veil of the heart," adds Piccarda, " she was never unbound."³

Dante was vexed with two questions. Do the souls return to the stars, as Plato states in his *Timæus*, and has each soul a special star? He is taught by Beatrice what is very significant in the interpretation of the *Paradiso*. The Celestial Paradise she represents to be a term of allegory. The souls are said to be

¹ A duo voler ne invoglid.

² *Par.*, iii., 64.

³ *Par.*, iii., 117.

distributed throughout the solar system, not because these spheres are literally allotted to them but to suggest celestial conditions of various degrees, and to teach Dante by objects of sense.¹

The Scripture therefore condescends to meet
 The feeble measure of the human mind,
 And thus to God attributes hands and feet,
 In which a deeper meaning is designed.
 And Holy Church with face of human kind
 Does Gabriel and Michael represent,
 And Him who sight restored to Tobit blind.²

The next question is how far one is guilty in breaking a vow under compulsion? Beatrice teaches him that a vow is the sacrifice to God of the will, and no other sacrifice can make up for the subsequent withdrawal of this. Besides, no one can be forced to do anything:

Will Absolute consents not to the wrong,
 Except so far as fearing to refrain,
 Lest it should meet the consequence of pain.³

Those who have their seat in the Heaven of the Moon are persons of imperfect wills. They

¹ Da sensato.—*Par.*, iv., 41.

² *Par.*, iv., 43–48.

^{xx}

³ *Par.*, iv., 109–111.

are not fitted for a higher place, because they did not sacrifice their life for their convictions of what was right. They obeyed human authority when this was in conflict with Divine obligation, and broke a vow to God in order that they might be dutiful to man. These are formalists, observing the letter, violating the spirit, and therefore through their blindness only fit to sit in the lowest place of Paradise.

On mounting to the next sphere, the poet says:

I write the words as uttered by my guide;
Then did she turn herself with longing true
Towards that world that is most vivified.
Her silence, her transfigured face, subdue
My soul, that still would high discourse pursue;
For fresh the light it had already stored;
And as an arrow strikes the target through,
Ere ceases the vibration of the cord,
So to that second realm, without a sound, we
soared.

And there my Lady seemed so jubilant,
As in the light that from that heaven is shed,
That the star's self shone out more radiant.¹

¹ *Par.*, v., 85-96.

This is the Heaven of Mercury. Here,
Dante states,

A thousand thousand points of radiance
Stole toward us, and a voice arose from these:
“ Lo one is come to-day who shall our loves in-
crease.”¹

He addresses one Splendour that has de-
tached itself from the rest:

“ I know not, Sainted Spirit, who thou art;
Nor why thy dwelling is the sphere, which rays
Brighter than are its own, conceal from mortal
gaze.”

So speaking, I that Point of Flame addressed
Which first had spoken to me, which then I
thought

An even brighter radiance did invest;
Just as the sun, when sudden heat to nought
The haze of mantling vapour clouds has brought,
Hides in excess of light his radiance;
So, through sheer joy, that holy figure sought
In its own rays a hiding-place, and thence
Spoke, what the Canto next to follow shall ad-
vance.²

The spirit is that of the Emperor Justinian,
who gives an account of the triumph of the

¹ *Par.*, v., 103.

² *Par.*, v., 127 *ad fin.*

Roman eagle in a superb passage which contains a vivid and masterly epitome of Roman history. Of this sphere of Mars the spirit says:

“ This tiny planet doth itself adorn
With noble spirits who have dared and done
That fame and honour might by valorous deeds
be won.”¹

The love of fame is not the highest motive of service. Those who thus work do not love their task for the reflection of its blessedness in their own mind, or because it carries out the will of God, but for the reflection they see of it and of themselves in the minds of others. This love of human opinion and applause abridges the liberty of the will and renders it incapable of pure service to God. These “ clear spirits ” are prevented from attaining to the sphere of the Eagle and the Cross because they were slaves to that fame, love of which is the “ last infirmity of noble minds.”

As this soul adores, the song is raised,
“ Hosanna, Holy God of SabaOTH,”—and it, and the others, moved with their dance, and

¹ *Par.*, vi., 112-114.

“ like swiftest sparks veiled themselves, suddenly and at a distance.”¹ Beātrice, in answer to a question of the poet, explains the fall of man, and the doctrine of redemption, according to the interpretation of scholasticism. She proves man’s immortality by the argument that man stands to his Creator in a relation different from that of other created things that perish. The elements of the lower creatures receive their specific life and being, not direct from God, but through the informing intelligence, His ministers and angels. But the Supreme Benignity inspires man’s life without intermediary.

“ Goodness Divine, without an agent, breathes
Life into us, and does with love inspire
Towards our Maker, and with warm desire;
Hence you may reason that the dead shall rise,
If from the Holy Scripture you enquire
How human flesh was made, and in what wise
Life to the primal pair was given in Paradise.”²

From thence they rapidly sweep upwards to
the Heaven of Venus, where are the spirits of
Lovers:

¹ *Par.*, vii., 7.

² *Par.*, vii., 142–148.

I felt not our ascent into this star;
But one thing certified me we were there,—
My Lady's face had grown more beautiful.¹

Here they both see lights moving in circles, more or less rapidly, and hear sounding the hymn “Hosanna,” so that never since has he been without desire of hearing it again. He is accosted by the spirit of George Martel of Hungary, who had been his benefactor and friend in life.² Charles Martel died at the age of twenty-three after marrying the daughter of Rudolph of Hapsburg, Emperor of Germany,—beautiful Clemence, Dante calls her. He explains the history of his own fortunes, the Sicilian Vespers, and the fatal niggardliness of his brother, the King of Naples, who was sprung of a generous father. Dante enquires how bitter can issue from sweet seed, and is told that revolving nature, *i. e.*, the heavenly bodies, which are the seal of mortal wax, and by their influence form mortal dispositions to be jovial, saturnine, or mercurial, do so by Divine Providence without discrimination in choosing the individuals they work upon.³

¹ *Par.*, viii., 13–15. ² *Par.*, viii., 49. ³ *Par.*, viii., 127.

That is, there is neither law of heredity nor law of evolution in physical descent.

Amongst other lovers in the Heaven of Venus appears one who comes, “a Light singing, as one whom doing good delights.”¹ This spirit says, “Cunizza was I called, and I am resplendent here, because the light of this planet conquered me.”² Of this lady a contemporary of Dante’s says, “She lived without impropriety, in love of dress, song, and sport.”³ Next is seen Folco of Marseilles, a gay troubadour of the twelfth century, patronised by Richard Cœur de Lion, and afterwards a Cistercian monk and persecutor of the Albigenses; into his mouth Dante puts a bitter address to Florence:

“ The city, which was planted by the fiend⁴
Who first from the Creator turned away,
And where the roots of envious hate display
Bloom so abundant, stamps in gold the flower.⁵

¹ *Par.*, ix., 24.

² *Par.*, ix., 32.

³ Questa donna visse amorosamente, in vestire, canto, e gioco, ma non con alcuna disonestade o inlicito atto consenti.—*Ottimo Commento*.

⁴ Satan.

⁵ The florin, so called from the lily stamped on it.

Accursed, and squanders it so lavishly,
 That sheep and lambs are scattered through its
 power,
 For them the Shepherd's self does like a wolf de-
 vour."¹

The denizens of Venus also have upon them the stamp of a definite limitation, for human love, for friend, lover, family, or parents, noble as it is, is earthly,—and a degree removed from the perfection of Divine love, revealed, as in Francis, for the outcast stranger, or in Peter Damian and Bernard for the contemplation of God.

Dante and Beatrice next find themselves in the Heaven of the Sun. The refulgence was indescribable.

The Sun I entered, where the spirits shine
 In their own lustre; but how radiant must
 They be, whom never varied tints define,
 But light alone, 't is vain in art I trust,
 Genius or skill, to tell with language just,
 Even to fancy; but they still may be
 Objects of longing, when by faith perused,
 And since the sun dazzles our mortal eye
 No wonder that the mind faints before things so
 high.²

¹ *Par.*, ix., 127-132.

² *Par.*, x., 40-48.

Dante feels gratitude to God, and all his love was so set on God that Beatrice was eclipsed in oblivion.¹

This dazzling light means the flawless perfection of the saintly intellect, for the Sun is the Heaven of the Wise and those learned in theology. There the poet sees many living and surpassing effulgences, who make a centre of him and Beatrice, taking themselves the shape of a crown, more sweet in voice than shining in aspect. After these burning suns had circled three times round the strangers, a voice is heard from one of them, which proceeds to tell them with what plants that garland of stars is enflowered. The voice is that of Thomas Aquinas, the great pillar and champion of scholasticism, the Angelic Doctor. He proceeds to name the members of the starry choir of theologians; after which, in the beautiful words of the poet,

Like a horologe that calls to tell

When rises up the Bride of God to bring
Her matins, that her Lord may love her well,

And wheel and hammer urge the clear Ting,
Ting,

¹ *Par.*, x., 58.

So that all grateful spirits listening
 Expand with love; 't was thus that shining band
 With voices of linked music, 'gan to sing
 And circle; that song's sweetness understand
 None save in that abode, where joy can never end.¹

Thomas Aquinas relates the life of Francis d'Assisi, the founder of the Franciscans, who, still a youth, "ran to strife with his father" (in guerra de padre corse) for a lady to whom and to Death no one unlocks the gate of pleasure. This lady is, of course, Poverty, who, deprived of her first husband, Jesus Christ, had stood, despised and obscure, without wooer, until Francis came. The Angelic Doctor thus speaks:

Bereaved of her first husband she had bided,
 One thousand and one hundred years and more,
 Discountenanced, neglected, and derided;
 And, till this man, she lived without a wooer;
 What boots it to be told Amyclas' door²
 Screened her untrembling before him, who reigned
 In terror o'er the world of rich and poor;
 Or, that when Mary 'neath the Cross remained,
 She mounted to the Tree the blood of Christ had
 stained.

¹ *Par.*, x., 139-148.

² Lucan, *Pharsalia*, v., 521.

And lest my riddle be not apprehended
In this diffuse narration, understand
That Poverty and Francis are intended
By these two lovers, walking hand in hand,
With such accord and gladness, thro' the land;
That all, with love and wonder in their eyes,
Felt holy thoughts within their bosom fanned;
Till stately Bernard first his shoes unties
And feels too late, though fast, for peace, he fol-
lowing flies.

O wealth unrecognised, O bliss complete,
Whose charm was such, that soon that happy
pair,
Giles and Sylvester followed, with bared feet,
Behind the Spouse whose Bride appeared so fair;
United by the girdle that they wear
Master and Lady and attendant train
Set out. That he was Bernardone's heir
Disherited gave him no coward pain,
Nor that the world looked on with wonder and
disdain.

But king-like he to Innocent revealed
His hardy purpose; and from him obtained
The earliest sanction that his Order sealed;
And when his Mendicants in numbers gained,
In following that bright life whose praise per-
tained
More to heaven's glory, than to earth below,
Their archimandrite was the man ordained,

For Pope Honorius heard his holy vow,
And by God's spirit placed this crown upon his
brow.

And when, thro' thirst to gain a martyr's crown,
He preached of Christ and of his followers fain
In presence of the Sultan's haughty frown,
And seeing unripe for grace, that court profane,
He had returned, lest he should run in vain,
To the rich harvest of the Italian shore,
On a wild rock, between the springs that drain
Tiber's and Arno's floods, from Christ he bore
The Seal which for two years in hands and feet he
wore.

And when it pleased the Being, who did call him
To the great blessedness of life so holy,
In that bright place of recompense to install him
Which he had merited by being lowly,
His cherished Lady he commended wholly,
As to just heirs, with charge to love her dear,
To all his friars, who did not count it folly
That from her bosom wished that spirit clear
Heavenward to start, nor asked his body nobler
bier.¹

A second circle of the spirits of the Wise,
headed by Bonaventura, now appears. Bon-
aventura, the great Franciscan, relates the life

¹ *Par.*, xi., 64-117.

of Dominick, founder of the Dominicans, a preaching order:

“ There is a region whence the zephyr blows
 To ope the leaves, when summer’s vernal prime
 O’er Europe’s hills its verdant mantle throws
 [Not far from where the billows toss and climb
 Beyond whose fury men from time to time
 See the sun sink behind the watery field];
 There the white roofs of Calahorra gleam,
 A happy town, protected by the shield
 Whose towers the lion rules, or to the lion yield.¹

“ In it was born that lover emulous
 Of Christian truth, that champion anoint,
 Kind to his own, to the rebellious
 As cruel; at whose birth did God appoint
 That with his intellect should he conjoint
 Such vivid virtue, as prophetic power
 Gave to his Mother; and when he was signed
 As the Faith’s follower at the font, the hour
 Each mutually gave to each an equal dower,

“ The woman, who for him had answer made,
 Saw in a dream what service wonderful
 By him and by his heirs should be repaid.²

.

¹ This alludes to the arms of Castile, in which is one castle with a lion below it, and another with a lion above.

² *Par.*, xii., 46–66.

" With learning and with energy redoubted
On mission apostolic did he speed,
Like torrent from a brimming basin spouted;
And all his rage against the heretic breed
Smote heaviest where resistance to his creed
Was stubbornest; from him those currents darted,
Which to the Church's garden brought in need
The freshening waters, and such strength imparted
That in more vigorous life each tender sapling
started."¹

In the Heaven of Mars they find the spirits
of Saintly Warriors ranged in the shape of a
dazzling cross. These Warriors did not fight
for fame. There is a strain of rapture in the
poet's description:

" Here memory quite outstrips the power of mind,
For on that Cross like lightning shimmered
Christ;
For this I can no fitting image find;
But he who takes his Cross and follows Christ,
And sees in all that gleam the light of Christ,
Will yield me pardon for my falling short.
From arm to arm, from base to loftiest
Extremity, their way the Splendours wrought,
Bright-sparkling, oft as each to each was nearer
brought.

¹ *Par.*, xii., 97-105.

“ And as the motes across a sunbeam sport,
 Swift, slow, and visible in endless train,
Dancing aslant, or straight, or long, or short,
 Where the barred rays across the shadow strain—
 The shadow, art has laboured to obtain;
And as the violin and harp accord,
 Uttering from many strings a soft refrain,
Tho’ he who listens may not catch a word,
 But only knows how sweet the music he has heard,—

“ So from the Lights that struck my vision dim,
 Upon the Cross, was gathered up a strain
That my heart ravished, tho’ I heard no hymn;
 That ’t was a song of thanksgiving was plain,
 Since, “ Rise and Conquer,” in a loud refrain,
Reached me, as one without intelligence;
 So much enamoured did I then remain,
Since ne’er before with such sweet violence
Had aught of melody ravished my every sense.”¹

Dante here meets his ancestor Cacciaguida, who speaks of the Florence of bygone days and contrasts the present city in its wickedness and violence with the simplicity and virtue of ancient times. Then he foretells the exile of Dante and his fame as a poet. The prophecy of Dante’s exile has been already quoted.² Cacciaguida adds:

¹ *Par.*, xiv., 103-129.

² See p.

“ The conscience that has stain,
 From other’s infamy, or from its own,
 Wilt hear thine utterance with a pang of pain;
 But natheless, if all falsehood thou disown,
 I bid thee make thy mighty vision known,
 And let those wince who feel they bear the sore;
 Since if thy song be harsh to anyone
 At the first taste, it will when pondered more,
 Yield living food to those who can digest its lore.

“ This cry of thine shall act as doth the blast
 Which smites the highest summits of the world.
 No little proof to thee of praise at last.”¹

The poet describes himself as cut to the heart by the prophecy of his banishment. He is consoled by Beatrice:

“ Thy thoughts dismiss, and think how near am I
 To Him who can for every wrong atone ”;
 I turned me, as her voice thus tenderly
 Consoled me; here I will not dwell upon
 The love that in those sainted eyes before me shone;

’T is not alone because my power is small
 In eloquence, or that my tongue would fail;
 But that the unaided mind cannot recall
 The things that are so far above its scale.
 This much on that point does my skill avail

¹ *Par.*, xvii., 124-135.

To tell you,—that one glance into her face
 Made other fires within my bosom pale.
 As that eternal bliss which poured its rays
 On Beatrice’s brow, reflected held my gaze,

She checked me with a smile of light divine,
 “ Turn thee,” she said, “ and hear; thy Paradise
 Is not alone within these eyes of mine.”¹

From the red Heaven of Mars they pass to
 the pallid sphere of Jupiter, where the bands
 of perfected spirits of light are ranged, like
 gold letters on a silver ground, so as to form
 the sentence, “ Love justice, ye that judge the
 earth.”² Then they change so as to make
 the pattern of a gigantic eagle, representative
 of the Empire of Barbarossa and his successors,
 which with Dante was the Empire, as co-ordin-
 ate with, but independent of, the Church.

Then as the stricken fire-logs throw a crowd
 Of sparks, in which the future fools divine;
 So I surveyed that phosphorescent cloud
 Of lights towards the upper air incline,
 High as the sun which lit them would define
 Limits to each; and as each took his place
 At rest, I saw the blazing band combine,

¹ *Par.*, xviⁱ., 124–135.
 12

² *Par.*, xviii., 91.

Upon the gleaming fire's embroidered face,
An eagle's head and neck with vivid line to trace.¹

From this Eagle a voice proceeds to answer Dante's question on Divine Justice. This voice declares that our vision, exploring Divine Justice, penetrates it as the eye looking down upon the sea in mid-ocean. It cannot see the bottom, which nevertheless is there, though the depth conceals it.

Jupiter is the seat of the Just and of princes who love righteousness, and among them is Ripheus the Trojan, a pagan, whom Virgil has described as the most just and the most studious of rectitude of all the Trojans. This Gentle, a thousand years before the institution of baptism, was saved by Faith, Hope, and Charity.

When they reach the seventh Heaven, that of Saturn, Beatrice ceases to smile and the air is silent. She tells her companion that at such an altitude in light her smile would consume him, as the sight of Jupiter turned Semele to ashes.² In this circle are the souls of those who have given themselves to devout contem-

¹ *Par.*, xviii., 100-108.

² *Par.*, xxi., 4.

plation, the highest use of human intellect. Here is the golden stairway to the upper heaven.

Within the crystal, which, revolving round
The world, the title of its King revered
Still bears, whose reign in death all evil drowned,
A ladder tinted like the gold appeared
To me, sun-lit, and yet so high it reared
Its top, my vision failed to follow it.

Again I saw that every rung was starred
With points of light, that upward seemed to flit,
So that with all the rays of Heaven I thought it lit.

And as the rooks, by natural habitude,
Take wing together at the break of day,
To warm their feathers by the night wind rude
Benumbed, and while some swiftly speed away
Without return, others one flight essay,
And then regain their starting-place, some wheel
In air still hovering where their young they lay,—
In such wise did those lights innumerable
Fly off in sparks whene'er the ladder rungs they
feel.¹

The Splendour who stops on the stairway to accost Dante is St. Peter Damian, a severe ascetic of the tenth century, who joined the Benedictine order. Dante asks him why he

¹ *Par.*, xxi., 25-42.

was predestined to descend the golden stairway
for the purpose of accosting the poet? This
is Damian's answer on the subject of Predes-
tination:

"No soul in Heaven, whose intellect is clearest,
Could any answer give to thee in this,
Nor Seraph, whose fixed eye sees God the nearest;
Because deep-buried, down in the abyss
Of the eternal Providence it lies,
Barred off beyond the reach of human ken;
And when the earth once more shall meet thine
eyes
Report this answer, so that ne'er again
This goal be vainly sought by feet of mortal men."¹

After St. Benedict has given an account of the founding of his order and the subsequent corruptions into which it fell, Dante mounts the stairway, reaches the eighth Heaven, that of the Fixed Stars, and looks back and sees the earth. It has dwindled into insignificance as seen from so lofty an altitude.

"Now it behoves thy sight be keen and clear,"
To me my Beatrice then began;
"Thine ultimate salvation is so near,
Which ere thou dost embrace, turn back thy
glance and scan

¹ *Par.*, xxi., 91-99.

“ The many worlds that I beneath thy feet
Have ordered, so thy heart, with joy elate,
As far as that be possible, may meet
The throng triumphant and may contemplate
As round the ring ethereal they wait.”
And I as my strained sight I backward cast,
Thro’ the seven orbs, saw in what mean estate
The earth appears, by all the rest surpassed,
And wisest him I deem who holds it least and last,
And who to other circles turns his thought
May well be called a mortal truly wise.
I saw Latona’s daughter shine with naught
Of shadow such as prompted my surmise
That rare and dense must be her qualities;
The splendour of thy child, Hyperion,
I thence could bear, and lo! before my eyes,
Around and near him, wheeled Dione’s son
And Maia’s, and beyond Jove’s tempering radiance
shone
Between his sire and son; henceforth the changes
Of their position in the sky were clear;
And all the planets seven, as each ranges,
Through ether, showed to me how vast they were,
How swift, and how distinct in scope and sphere.
And ’mid the eternal twins that threshing-floor
So tiny, which so haughty makes us, sheer
From hill to haven I could well explore.
Then to her beauteous eyes I turned my eyes once
more.¹

¹ *Par.*, xxii. 124 *ad fin.*

This wonderful retrospect comes fitly following upon a conversation with Peter Damian of Catria.

" There rise high cliffs 'twixt two Italian shores,
And not far distant from thy native town,
So high, the very thunder 'neath them roars;
Catria they call the ridge their summits crown;
Which on a consecrated cell looks down,
A hermit's home, for prayer and worship fit."

Thus the third time the spirit had made known His mind, and added, " While I dwelt in it, Upon God's service I so firm my spirit set,

" That for sole food the olive's juice I took,
And lightly bore the heat and wintry cold,
With thoughts contemplative content. That nook
Did to the heavens yield tribute manifold." ¹

He is examined by St. Peter and St. James concerning Faith; St. John examining him concerning Love. He reaches with Beatrice the Crystalline Heaven, and sees the seven circles of the heavenly hierarchy revolving round the Divine Presence. Next he ascends to the Empyrean, whence appears to view the River of Light:

¹ *Par.*, xxi., 106-119.

And I saw light that like a river flowed,
Tawny with gold, and either margin bore
The flowers a spring miraculous bestowed;
And from that stream did living sparks upsoar,
And, from each side, upon the flowerets pour,
As they were rubies set in plates of gold.
Then as transported by those sweets, once more
They plunged into the stream, that, as it rolled,
Would now fling out the sparks, now in its waves
enfold.¹

This river of light is succeeded by a Snow-white Rose, in which shape the saintly host
arrange themselves.

The army of the saints before me stood,
Marshalled in fashion as a snow-white rose,
The Bride our Saviour wedded in His blood.
But like a swarm of bees, which sometimes close
Nestles in flowerets, sometimes homeward goes
To the sweet labour of the hive, on wings
Untired, thus forth a stream of angels flows;
His glory, whom beyond imaginings
They love, His goodness, which exalts, each sees
and sings.

Into that mighty flower, which is made fair
With so great petals, did the angelic band
Descend; and thence mount up, retiring where
Their love for ever finds its native land;

¹ *Par.*, xxx., 61-69.

Their faces were of living fire, they fanned
 The air with gold, their robes outshone the snow,
 And as upon that dazzling flower they land,
 O'er the ranged petals fluttering they bestow
 The peace and zeal which they before God's Pre-
 sence know.

Nor, tho' this overflowing cohort render
 Their service 'twixt heaven's High One and the
 Star,
 Do they impede the vision, and the splendour;
 Because the light Divine has so great power,
 That all its penetrating glories shower
 On every spot, as it is worthy seen;
 That safe and joyful kingdom every hour,
 Crowded from every nation that has been,
 Or is, its glance and love turns to one point serene.

O Trinal Light, which on each single star
 Concentred sparkling, each can satisfy;
 Look down upon this earth's tempestuous jar.¹

Into this rose Beatrice is taken up, and
 catching sight of her there Dante addresses to
 her his last words of gratitude:

"Lady, in whom my hopes concentrated meet,
 Who for my safety didst thyself abase
 To set in Hell the impress of thy feet;
 The kindly work of virtue and of grace,
 In all that met my eyes below I trace;

¹ *Par.*, xxxi., 1-30.

And 't is thy goodness has the lesson taught.
Thou didst from slavery me to freedom raise,
By all those paths, all those expedients fraught
With mercy, which, thro' thee, have my salvation
wrought.

“ O let thy spirit high still watch o'er me;
So that this soul of mine, which thou hast healed,
When loosed from clay, may still be dear to thee.”
So prayed I; she far off her face revealed
Smiling, and with one lingering glance appealed
To me, then to the Eternal Fountain turned.¹

During the last stage of the poet's journey
he is guided by St. Bernard, who brings him
to see the Beatific Vision:

In that clear orb of self-existent light
Three rings, of vivid ray, were blazoned keen;
Each of three hues, all of one width and height.
The first was in the second reflected seen
Like rainbows spanning Heaven in opaline;
The third was like a fire that did emit
From this one and from that an equal sheen;
But vain are words, and vain is human wit
To paint in colours true the Splendour Infinite.

O Light Eternal! in Thyself alone
That dweltest, Who alone art comprehended
By Thine Own Self, knowing Thyself and known

¹ *Par.*, xxxi., 79-93.

To no one else, in love and smiles unended;
That circle, in reflected light extended
In Thee, as it appeared, when I surveyed,
Seemed to contain, with its own colour blended,
An outlined image on the light portrayed,
Absorbing my fixed glance, in human pattern
made.¹

This is the Blessed Trinity, God revealed in
the effigy of man.

Any analysis, even the clearest and most comprehensive, would be a very inadequate representation of Dante's "mystic unfathomable song." No doubt some people will look upon the *Paradiso* as stiff and conventional in the form of its setting, and removed by this very prim artificiality far away from the sympathies of an age that loves the sweet and delicate though possibly superficial modernism of Tennyson, and the thorny thicket of Browning's robust, daring, but somewhat formless poetry. Nevertheless Dante's *Paradiso* is the most profound, the most artistic, the most spiritual poem that was ever written. I do not use the word spiritual here in the sense of heavenly minded or religious (though the poem

¹ *Par.*, xxxiii, 115-132.

deserves these epithets also); by spiritual I mean indicative of intellectual insight, coupled with a deep sense of the higher and less material and transitory ends of life. Viewed as a panorama of an ideal world it is not only beautiful, but it is pervaded with mystery and wonder and crowded with life and interest. We cannot banish from our minds the mighty cross flecked with ranks of moving flames, wherein the warrior saints have ranged themselves, nor the eagle of fire which gathers within its outline the mighty kings who have ruled strongly and well. The *Paradiso* is a spectacle of ever-shifting light-centres, of ever-sounding music; every sphere is instinct with love and knowledge. Human passion and human suffering are there unknown; as the planets move in their orbits under the sway of those intelligences which form the heavenly hierarchy and receive their life from the Divine Mind round which they centre, so every spirit in the *Paradiso* turns in love and desire of knowledge to Him in whose Will is its peace.

And speaking of the artistic side of this great work, let me point out two especial feat-

ures of the *Paradiso*. First of all I would have you notice how much Dante leaves to the imagination of the reader. Macaulay was only partially right when he said that the difference between Milton's and Dante's imagination was that Milton loved the indefinite and Dante the definite in his description. The fact is, that while in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* we have things and places positively identified by reference to scenes and objects familiar to the Italian reader, in the *Paradiso* there is nothing to recall natural scenery or earthly buildings. Scarcely a human face appears through the whole of the planetary heavens excepting the face of Beatrice, and in that one vision where the crowd of eager eyes looks out as if reflected upon polished transparent glass through which the blue of heaven too is visible.

The vision of the *Paradiso* is vague and nebulous. The poet's memory fails, he says, to recall all he saw, or the full impression of it. He declines to describe the love he discerned in the eyes of Beatrice when she consoled him on the subject of his exile,—“not only because of distrust of his own speech, but because of

the memory which cannot return so far above itself.” He says that the beatified spirits began songs “which lapse and fall from out his memory.” The cry of the holy ones was of such deep sound, and its thunder so overcame him, that he could not “understand its meaning.” He is like a man who wakes and retains in mind the impression of a dream, but not its incidents. The recollections of Paradise are like the Sibylline leaves,—swept away by a gust to be the sport of the gale.

In fact the scenery of the *Paradiso* is destitute of outline; it lacks both foreground and horizon. Not a single word of the poet connects it either by simile or description with anything sublunary. There are gradations of light, there is colour and movement and sound. There is no solid and substantial form, excepting the unchangeable form of the heavenly bodies circling in their orbits, and like wax rendering back the impression of that Divine Essence who is the Pure Form, the Pure Individuality, the Pure Consciousness, which the Platonism of the poet represents as the source from which the pattern of the universe flows

forth. These are instances of artistic subtlety of the highest order, and increase amazingly the effect of the poem to those who read and reread it.

The other point to which I wish to draw attention is one of less importance, namely, the aim of the poet in producing a simile to indicate also a contrast. This is sufficiently apparent in the *Inferno*, where the hideous rout of fiends haunting the lakes of burning pitch calls to his mind the flower of Florentine chivalry pricking over the plain in glittering armour to meet their foes at Campaldino. The horned demons, driving before them with scourges the flying sinners, are placed before the reader's eye in juxtaposition, and compared to the mighty host in festal array gallantly crossing the bridge to the Castle of St. Angelo, in the year of Jubilee. So with his comparison of the pits of boiling pitch to the noble Arsenal at Venice.

In this class of similes the horror of what he describes is enhanced by contrast in the beauty, pomp, or grace of that to which it is compared.

In the *Paradiso* the opposite course is taken. The simile introduces a mean and trivial thing

as that to which the movement or spectacle in Paradise is compared.

When St. Bernard is describing the glittering pageant of the Saints who represent the Church Triumphant in the Rose of Paradise, he says: “But we will direct our eyes to the First Love, and here make a stop, like a good tailor who makes a gown according as he has cloth.”¹ Nature, in receiving the stamp of the Supreme Mind, is said to give a defective impression, working like an artist who has a hand that trembles.² The light with which one beatified soul enwraps itself is in another place compared to a cocoon.³ Then notice the triviality of the simile in *Par.*, xxv., 130, where the image of a boatswain’s whistle is introduced.

The moving Splendours which represent souls are compared to the sparks which fly from a burning log when it is struck for the purpose of telling fortunes from the number of those specks of light and direction of their flight.⁴

The dignity and beauty of the thing he is describing are, in the poet’s intention, deep-

¹ *Par.*, xxxii., 139.

² *Par.*, xiii., 76.

³ *Par.*, viii., 54.

⁴ *Par.*, xviii., 100.

ened and intensified by contrast with the trivial and paltry features of the thing to which it is compared, and which in the point of the comparisons it resembles.

In the *Paradiso* is found a most beautiful and concise summary of the best solution which Christian philosophy had or even has discovered to the most perplexing problems. The poet's account of the Fall of Man, of Redemption, of Human Immortality, and his theory of Human Knowledge are as fresh as ever they were. Faith, Hope, and Love are defined and illustrated in profound and sagacious terms. In no human production has the splendour of the human intelligence, the peace and happiness of a glorified human existence, been so sincerely, so logically, and so impressively expounded. In these days of cautious induction, of suspended judgment, of half faith and intellectual doubt, some may look upon this poem as the delirium of a scholastic enthusiast. But we would rather call it the vision whose light a world-tormented poet had kindled from the torturing flame of his own bosom, in order that he might bask for a mo-

ment in a Beatific Vision, and hand in hand with Beatrice walk through those worlds from whose exalted circles the earth which held Florence should appear in that “ ignoble semblance ” which he would contemplate with a disdainful smile.

For it is in reading the *Paradiso* especially that the personal character of Beatrice, and the personal relation she bore to Dante as the object of his earliest, purest, and most sacred love, come home to us with peculiar emphasis. It may be said that Beatrice represents Theology, as that other lady represents Speculative Philosophy, and Virgil represents Human Reason. It may be said that the eyes of Beatrice, into which Dante looks, are the proofs that the smile of Beatrice is the persuasiveness of theological argument. Nevertheless no one can read this final book of Dante, with all its tender descriptions, its allusions to the strength, nobility, and constancy of her who was the poet’s guide, without detecting the undertone which indicates a real person whose grace of character had won his heart, as well as enlightened his intellect. It may have been

Divine Science that led Dante to trust to the intuitions of faith, rather than to the inductions of reason, but the voice that called him back from wandering mazes of philosophy to the serene atmosphere of his early innocent and religious boyhood, was the voice which he had one day heard in the home of Folco Portinari. The vision of Portinari's child blent itself with the serious investigations of later and darker days, and the girl who had stirred his pulses to a feeling in which were mingled love and religious worship, seemed afterwards to turn for him the pages of Thomas Aquinas, yea, to conduct him, by her messengers or her personal presence, through the triple realm, which was at once his lifelong experience and the area of his mental investigations. To whatever height of emancipation he ultimately attained, he felt that it was to her he owed the attainment, and to her he gives the acknowledgment of his gratitude:

"Thou didst from slavery me to freedom raise,
By all those paths, all those expedients fraught
With mercy, which, through thee, have my salva-
tion wrought."



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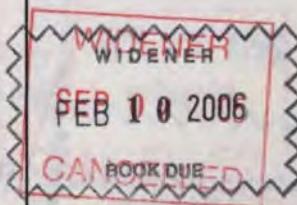


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